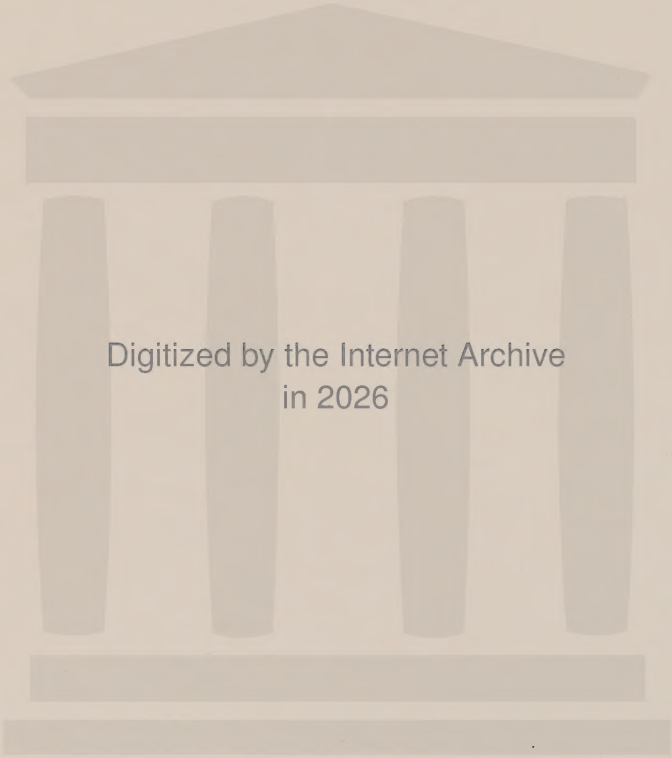
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THE

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SERMONS PREACHED AND REVISED

BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

DURING THE YEAR 1885.

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C. H. SPURGEON AND THE TITLES OF SOME OF HIS WORKS, 1884.

TO

THE ONE GOD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH,

IN

THE TRINITY OF HIS SACRED PERSONS,

BE ALL HONOUR AND GLORY

WORLD WITHOUT END,

AMEN.

TO THE GLORIOUS FATHER, AS THE COVENANT GOD OF ISRAEL;

TO THE GRACIOUS SON, THE REDEEMER OF HIS PEOPLE;

TO THE HOLY GHOST, THE AUTHOR OF SANCTIFICATION;

BE EVERLASTING PRAISE FOR THAT GOSPEL OF THE FREE GRACE OF GOD

HEREIN PROCLAIMED UNTO MEN.

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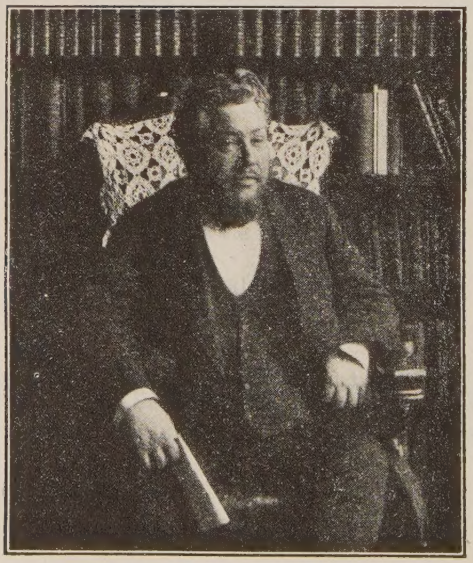
C. H. Spurgeon at fifty years of age.



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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SERMON FOR NEW YEAR'S-DAY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JANUARY 1ST, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."—Revelation xxi. 5.

How pleased we are with that which is new! Our children's eyes sparkle when we talk of giving them a toy or a book which is called new; for our short-lived human nature loves that which has lately come, and is therefore like our own fleeting selves. In this respect, we are all children, for we eagerly demand the news of the day, and are all too apt to rush after the "many inventions" of the hour. The Athenians, who spent their time in telling and hearing some new thing, were by no means singular persons: novelty still fascinates the crowd. As the world's poet says—

"All with one consent praise new-born gawds."

I should not wonder, therefore, if the mere words of my text should sound like a pleasant song in your ears; but I am thankful that their deeper meaning is even more joyful. The newness which Jesus brings is bright, clear, heavenly, enduring. We are at this moment specially ready for *a new year*. The most of men have grown weary with the old cry of depression of trade and hard times; we are glad to escape from what has been to many a twelve-months of great trial. The last year had become wheezy, croaking, and decrepit, in its old age; and we lay it asleep with a psalm of judgment and mercy. We hope that this new-born year will not be worse than its predecessor, and we pray that it may be a great deal better. At any rate, it is new, and we are encouraged to couple with it the idea of happiness, as we say one to another, "I wish you a happy New Year."

"Ring out the old, ring in the new;
Ring, happy bells, across the snow;
The year is going, let him go;
Ring out the false, ring in the true."

We ought not, as men in Christ Jesus, to be carried away by a childish love of novelty, for we worship a God who is ever the same, and of

whose years there is no end. In some matters "the old is better." There are certain things which are already so truly new, that to change them for anything else would be to lose old gold for new dross. The old, old gospel is the newest thing in the world; in its very essence it is for ever good news. In the things of God the old is ever new, and if any man brings forward that which seems to be new doctrine and new truth, it is soon perceived that the new dogma is only worn-out heresy dexterously repaired, and the discovery in theology is the digging up of a carcase of error which had better have been left to rot in oblivion. In the great matter of truth and godliness, we may safely say, "There is nothing new under the sun."

Yet, as I have already said, there has been so much evil about ourselves and our old nature, so much sin about our life and the old past, so much mischief about our surroundings and the old temptations, that we are not distressed by the belief that old things are passing away. Hope springs up at the first sound of such words as these from the lips of our risen and reigning Lord: "Behold, I make all things new." It is fit that things so outworn and defiled should be laid aside, and better things fill their places.

This is the first day of a new year, and therefore a solemnly joyous day. Though there is no real difference between it and any other day, yet in our mind and thought it is a marked period, which we regard as one of the milestones set up on the highway of our life. It is only in imagination that there is any close of one year and beginning of another; and yet it has most fitly all the force of a great fact. When men "cross the line," they find no visible mark: the sea bears no trace of an equatorial belt; and yet mariners know whereabouts they are, and they take notice thereof, so that a man can hardly cross the line for the first time without remembering it to the day of his death. We are crossing the line now. We have sailed into the year of grace 1885; therefore, let us keep a feast unto the Lord. If Jesus has not made us new already, let the new year cause us to think about the great and needful change of conversion; and if our Lord has begun to make us new, and we have somewhat entered into the new world wherein dwelleth righteousness, let us be persuaded by the season to press forward into the centre of his new creation, that we may feel to the full all the power of his grace.

The words he speaks to us to-night are truly divine. Listen,—"Behold, *I* make." Who is the great I? Who but the eternal Son of God? "Behold, *I make*." Who can make but God, the Maker of heaven and earth? It is his high prerogative to make and to destroy. "Behold, I *make all things*." What a range of creating power is here! Nothing stands outside of that all-surrounding circle. "Behold, I make all things *new*." What a splendour of almighty goodness shines out upon our souls! Lord, let us enter into this new universe of thine. Let us be new-created with the "all things." In us also may men behold the marvels of thy renewing love.

Let us now, at the portal of the new year, sing a hymn to Jesus, as we hear these encouraging words which he speaks from his throne. O Lord, we would rejoice and be glad for ever in that which thou dost create. The former troubles are forgotten, and are hid from our eyes

because of thine ancient promise,—"Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." (Isaiah lxv. 17).

I am going to talk to-night for a little upon *the great transformation* spoken of in the text, "I make all things new;" and then upon *the earnest call* in the text to consider that transformation: "He that sat upon the throne said, '*Behold*': attend, consider, look to it!" "Behold, I make all things new." Oh for a bedewing of the Holy Spirit while entering upon this theme! I would that our fleece might now be so wet as never to become dry throughout the whole year. Oh for a horn of oil to be poured on the head of the young year, anointing it for the constant service of the Lord!

I. Briefly, then, here is one of the grandest truths that ever fell even from the lips of Jesus:—"Behold, I make all things new." Let us gaze upon THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION.

This renewing work has been in our Lord's hands from of old. We were under the old covenant, and our first father and federal head, Adam, had broken that covenant, and we were ruined by his fatal breach. The substance of the old covenant was on this wise,—"If thou wilt keep my command thou shalt live, and thy posterity shall live; but if thou shalt eat of the tree which I have forbidden thee, dying, thou shalt die, and all thy posterity in thee." This is where we were found, broken in pieces, sore wounded, and even slain by the tremendous fall which destroyed both our Paradise and ourselves. We died in Adam as to spiritual life, and our death revealed itself in an inward tendency to evil which reigned in our members. We were like Ezekiel's deserted infant unswaddled and unwashed, left in our pollution to die; but the Son of God passed by and saw us in the greatness of our ruin. In his wondrous love our Lord Jesus put us under *a new covenant*, a covenant of which he became the second Adam, a covenant which ran on this wise,—"If thou shalt render perfect obedience and vindicate my justice, then those who are in thee shall not perish, but they shall live because thou livest." Now, our Lord Jesus, our Surety and Covenant Head, has fulfilled his portion of the covenant engagement, and the compact stands as a bond of pure promise without condition or risk. Those who are participants in that covenant cannot invalidate it, for it never did depend upon them, but only upon him who was and is their federal head and representative before God. Of Jesus the demand was made and he met it. By him man's side of the covenant was undertaken and fulfilled, and now no condition remains; it is solely made up of promises which are unconditional and sure to all the seed. To-day believers are not under the covenant of "If thou doest this thou shalt live," but under that new covenant which says, "Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." It is not now "Do and live," but "Live and do;" we think not of merit and reward, but of free grace producing holy practice as the result of gratitude. What law could not do, grace has accomplished.

We ought never to forget this bottom of everything, this making of all things new by the fashioning of a new covenant, so that we have come out from under the bondage of the law and the ruin of the fall, and we have entered upon the liberty of Christ, into acceptance with God, and into the boundless joy of being saved in the Lord with an everlasting

salvation, so that we "shall not be ashamed nor confounded world without end." You young people, as soon as ever you know the Lord, I exhort you to study well that word "covenant." It is a key-word opening the treasures of revelation. He that rightly understands the difference between the two covenants has the foundation of sound theology laid in his mind. This is the clue of many a maze, the open sesame of many a mystery. "I make all things new," begins with the bringing in of a better hope by virtue of a better covenant.

The foundation being made new, the Lord Jesus Christ has set before us *a new way of life*, which grows out of that covenant. The old way of life was, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments." There they are, perfect, and holy, and just, and good; but, alas, dear friends, you and I have broken the commandments. We dare not say that we have kept the ten commands from our youth up; on the contrary, we are compelled by our consciences to confess that in spirit and in heart, if not in act, we have continually broken the law of God; and we are therefore under sin and condemnation, and there is no hope for us by the works of the law. For this reason the gospel sets before us another way, and says, "It is of faith, that it might be by grace." "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Hence we read of being "justified by faith," and being made acceptable to God by faith. To be "justified" means being made really just: though we were guilty in ourselves we are regarded as just by virtue of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us. Thus we fell into condemnation through another, and we rise into justification through another. It is written, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities"; and this scripture is fulfilled in all those who believe in the Lord Jesus unto eternal life. Our path to eternal glory is the road of faith,—"The just shall live by faith." We are "accepted in the Beloved" when we believe in him whom God has set forth to be our righteousness. "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight"; but we are "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

What a blessing it is for you and for me that Jesus has made all things new in that respect! I am glad that I have not to stand here and say, "My dear hearers, do this and do that, and you will be saved": because you would not do as you were commanded; for your nature is weak and wicked. But I have to bid you—

> "Lay your deadly doing down, down at Jesus' feet;
> Stand in him, in him alone, gloriously complete."

I trust you will accept this most gracious and suitable way of salvation. It is most glorious to God and safe to you: do not neglect so great salvation. After you have believed unto life you will go and do all manner of holy deeds as the result of your new life; but do not attempt them with the view of earning life. Prompted no longer by the servile and selfish motive of saving yourself, but by gratitude for the fact that you are saved, you will rise to virtue and true holiness. Faith has brought us into the possession of an indefeasible salvation; and now for the love we bear our Saviour, we must obey him and become "zealous for good works."

By grace every believer is brought into *a new relationship* with God. Let us rejoice in this: "Thou art no more a servant but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Oh you who are now children, you were servants a little while ago! Some of you, my hearers, are servants now, and as servants I would bid you expect your wages. Alas, your service has been no service, but a rebellion; and if you get no more wages than you deserve you will be cast away for ever. You ought to be thankful to God that he has not yet recompensed you—that he has not dealt with you after your sins, nor rewarded you according to your iniquities. Do you not also know, you servants, what is likely to happen to you as servants? What do you yourself do with a bad servant? You say to him, "There are your wages: go." "A servant abideth not in the house for ever." You, too, will be driven out of your religious profession and your period of probation, and where will you go? The wilderness of destruction lies before you. Oh that you may not be left to wander with Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman!

"Behold, I make all things new," says Jesus, and then he makes his people into sons. When we are made sons do we work for wages? We have no desire for any present payment, for our Father says to us, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine"; and, moreover, we have the inheritance in reversion, entailed by the covenant. We cannot demand the servile wage because we have already all that our Father possesses. He has given us himself and his all-sufficiency for our everlasting portion; what more can we desire? He will never drive us from his house. Never has our great Father disowned one of his sons. It cannot be; his loving heart is too much bound up in his own adopted ones. That near and dear relationship which is manifested in adoption and regeneration, binds the child of God to the great Father's heart in such a way that he will never cast him off, nor suffer him to perish. I rejoice in the fact that we are no longer bond-slaves but sons. "Behold," says Christ, "I make all things new."

There has also been wrought in us by the work of the Holy Spirit *a new life*, with all the new feelings, and new desires, and new works which go therewith. The tree is made new, and the fruits are new in consequence. That same Spirit of God who taught us that we were ruined in our old estate, led us gently by the hand till we came to the New Covenant promise and looked to Jesus, and saw in him the full atonement for sin. Happy discovery for us; it was the kindling of new life in us. From the moment that we trusted in Jesus, a new life darted into our spirit. I am not going to say which is first, the new birth, or faith, or repentance. Nobody can tell which spoke of a wheel moves first; it moves as a whole. The moment the divine life comes into the heart we believe: the moment we believe the eternal life is there. We repent because we believe, and believe while we repent. The life that we live in the flesh is no longer according to the lusts of the world, but we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us. Our spiritual life is a new-born thing, the creation of the Spirit of life. We have, of course, that natural life which is sustained by food, and evidenced by our breath; but there is another life within which is not seen of men, nor fed by the provisions of earth.

We are conscious of having been quickened, for we were dead once, and we know it; but now we have passed from death into life, and we know it quite as certainly. A new and higher motive sways us now; for we seek not self but God. Another hand grasps the tiller and steers our ship in a new course. New desires are felt to which we were strangers in our former state. New fears are mighty within us,—holy fears which once we should have ridiculed. New hopes are in us, bright and sure, such as we did not even desire to know when we lived a mere carnal life. We are not what we were: we are new, and have begun a new career. We are not what we shall be, but assuredly we are not what we used to be. As for myself, my consciousness of being a new man in Christ Jesus is often as sharp and crisp as my consciousness of being in existence. I know I am not only and solely what I was by my first birth; I feel within myself another life—a second and a higher vitality which has often to contend with my lower self, and by that very contention makes me conscious of its existence. This new principle is, from day to day, gathering strength, and winning the victory. It has its hand upon the throat of the old sinful nature, and it shall eventually trample it like dust beneath its feet. I feel this within me: do not you? [*A loud voice, "Ay! ay!"*] Since you feel this, I know you can say to-night that Jesus Christ, who sits on the throne, makes all things new. Blessed be his name. [*Several voices, "Amen."*] It needed the Lord himself to make such as we are new. None but a Saviour on the throne could accomplish it; and therefore let him have the glory of it.

I believe that Jesus Christ has in some of you not only made you new, but *made everything new to you.* "Ah," said one, when she was converted, "either the world is greatly altered, or else I am." Why, either you and I are turned upside down in nature, or the world is. We used to think it a wise world once, but how foolish we think it now! We used to think it a brave gay world that showed us real happiness, but we are no longer deceived, we have seen Madame Bubble's painted face in its true deformity. "The world is crucified unto me," said Paul; and many of you can say the same. It is like a gibbeted criminal hung up to die. Meanwhile, there is no love lost, for the world thinks much the same of us, and therein we can sympathize with Paul when he said, "I am crucified unto the world." What a transformation grace makes in all things within our little world! In our heart there is a new heaven and a new earth. What a change in our joys! Ah, we blush to think what our joys used to be; but they are heavenly now. We are equally ashamed of our hates and our prejudices: but these have vanished once for all. Why, now we love the very things we once despised, and our heart flies as with wings after that which once it detested. What a different Bible we have now! Blessed book; it is just the same, but oh, how differently do we read it. The mercy-seat, what a different place it is now! Our wretched, formal prayers, if we did offer them—what a mockery they were! But now we draw near to God and speak with our Father with delight. We have access to him by the new and living way. The house of God, how different it is from what it used to be! We love to be found within its walls, and we feel delighted to join in the praises of the Lord. I do not know that I admire brethren for calling out in the service as our friends did just now; but I certainly do not blame them.

A person shook hands with me one day this week who does not often hear me preach, and he expressed to me his unbounded delight in listening to the doctrine of the grace of God, and he added, "Surely your people must be made of stone." "Why?" said I. "Why!" he replied, "if they were not they would all get up and shout 'Hallelujah' when you are preaching such a glorious gospel. I wanted to shout badly on Sunday morning; but as everybody else was quiet, I held my tongue." For which I thought he was a wise man: but yet I do not wonder if men who have tasted of the grace of God, and feel that the Lord has done great things for them, whereof they are glad, do feel like crying out for joy. Let us have a little indulgence to-night. Now, you that feel that you must cry aloud for joy, join with me and cry "Hallelujah." [*A great number of voices cried, "Hallelujah!"*] Hallelujah, glory be to our Redeemer's name. Why should we not lift up our voices in his praise? We will. He has put a new song into our mouths, and we must sing it. The mountains and the hills break forth before us into singing, and we cannot be dumb. Praise is our ever new delight; let us baptize the new year into a sea of it. In praise we will vie with angels and archangels, for they are not so indebted to grace as we are.

"Never did angels taste above
Redeeming grace and dying love."

But we have tasted these precious things, and unto God we will lift up our loudest song for ever and for ever.

The process which we have roughly described as taking place in ourselves is in other forms going on in the world. The whole creation is travailing, all time is groaning, providence is working, grace is striving, and all for one end,—the bringing forth of the new and better age. It is coming. It is coming. Not in vain did John write, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful." What a prospect does all this open up to the believer! Our future is glorious; let not our present be gloomy.

II. But now, in the text there is AN EARNEST CALL for us to consider this work of our Lord. He that sitteth on the throne saith, "*Behold*, I make all things new." Why should he call upon us to behold it? All his works deserve study: "The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." Whatsoever the Lord doeth is full of wisdom, and the wise will search into it. But when the Lord himself sets up a light, and calls us to pause, and look, we cannot help beholding.

I think that the Lord Jesus Christ especially calls us to consider this, that we may, according to our condition, derive profit from it.

First, if the Lord Jesus makes all things new, then *a new birth is possible* to you, dear friend, though you have come here to-night in a wrong state of heart, with your sins upon you, binding you fast. There is enough of light in your soul for you to know that you are in darkness; and you are saying to yourself, "Oh, that I could reach to better things! I hear how these people of God cry 'Hallelujah!' at what Christ has done for them. Can he do the same for me?" Listen! He that sitteth on the throne says in infinite condescension to you upon the dunghill, "Behold, I make all things new." There is nothing so old that he cannot make it new—nothing so fixed and habitual that he cannot change it. Dost thou not know, dear heart, that the Spirit of God has regenerated men and women quite as far gone as thou art? They have been as deeply sunken in sin, and as hardened by habit as ever thou canst be, and they thought themselves given up to despair, as thou thinkest thyself to be; yet the Spirit of God carried out the will of the Lord Christ, and made them new. Why should he not make *thee* new? Let every thief know that the dying thief entered heaven by faith in Jesus. Let every one that has been a great transgressor remember how Manasseh received a new heart, and repented of his evil deeds. Let every one who has left the paths of purity remember how the woman that was a sinner loved much, because much had been forgiven her. I cannot doubt of the possibility of your salvation, my dear friend, whenever I think of my own. A more determined, obstinate rebel than I could scarce have been. Child as I was, and under holy restraint as I was, so as to be kept from gross outward sin, I had a powerful inner nature which would not brook control. I strove hard and kicked against the pricks. I laboured to win heaven by self-righteousness, and this is as real a rebellion as open sin. But, oh, the grace of God, how it can tame us! How it can turn us! With no bit or bridle, but with a blessed suavity of tenderness, it turns us according to its pleasure. O anxious one, it can turn you! I want, then, to drop into your ear—and may the Spirit of God drop into your heart—this word, you may be born again. The Lord can work a radical change in you. He that sitteth on the throne can do for you what you cannot do for yourself; and, as he made you once, and you became marred by sin, he can new make you; for he saith, "Behold, I make all things new."

Furthermore, you will say to me, "I desire to lead *a new life*." To do this you must be new yourself; for as the man is, so his life will be. If you leave the fountain foul the streams cannot be pure. Renewal must begin with the heart. Dear friend, the Lord Jesus Christ is able to make your life entirely new. We have seen many transformed into new parents and new children. Friends have said in wonder, "What a change in John! What an alteration in Ellen!" We have seen men become new husbands, and women become new wives. They are the same persons, and yet not the same. Grace works a very deep, striking, and lasting change. Ask those that have had to live with converted people whether the transformation has not been marvellous. Christ makes new servants, new masters, new friends, new brothers, new sisters. The Lord can so change us that we shall scarcely know ourselves: I mean he can thus change you who now despair of yourselves. O

dear hearts, there is no absolute necessity that you should always go downward in evil till you descend to hell. There is a hand that can give you a gravitation in the opposite direction. It would be a wonderful thing if Niagara when it is in its full descent should be made to leap upwards, and the St. Lawrence and the sea should begin to climb backward to the lakes. Yet God could do even that; and so he can reverse the course of your fallen nature, and make you act as a new man. He can stay the tide of your raging passion; he can make you, who were like a devil, become as an angel of God; for thus he speaks from the throne of his eternal majesty, "Behold, I make all things new." Come and lay yourself down at his feet, and ask him to make you new. I beseech you, do this at once!

"Well, I am going to mend myself," says one: "I have taken the pledge, and I am going to be honest, and chaste, and religious." This is commendable resolving, but what will come of it? You will break your resolutions, and be nothing bettered by your attempts at reform. I expect that if you go into the business of mending yourself, you will be like the man who had an old gun, and took it to the gunsmith, and the gunsmith said, "Well, this would make a very good gun if it had a new stock, and a new lock, and a new barrel." So you would make a very good man by mending, if you had a new heart, and new life, and were made new all over, so that there was not a bit of the old stuff left. It will be easier, a great deal, depend upon it, even for God to make you new, than to mend you; for the fact is that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and is not reconciled to God, neither, indeed, can be; so that mending will not answer; you must be made anew. "Ye must be born again." What is wanted is that you should be made a new creature in Christ Jesus. You must be dead and buried with Christ, and risen again in him; and then all will be well, for he will have made all things new. I pray God to bless these feeble words of mine for the helping of some of his chosen out of the darkness of their fears.

But now, beloved, farther than this. There are children of God who need this text, "Behold, I make all things new," whose sigh is that they so soon grow dull and weary in the ways of God, and therefore they need *daily renewing*. A brother said to me some time ago, "Dear sir. I frequently grow very sleepy in my walk with God. I seem to lose the freshness of it; and especially by about Saturday I get I hardly know where; but," he added, "as for you, whenever I hear you, you seem to be all alive and full of fresh energy." "Ah, my dear brother," I said, "that is because you do not know much about me." That was all I was able to say just then. I thank God for keeping me near himself; but I am as weak, and stale, and unprofitable as any of you. I say this with very great shame—shame for myself, and shame for the brother who led me to make the confession. We are both wrong. With all our fresh springs in God, we ought to be always full of new life. Our love to Christ ought to be every minute as if it were new-born. Our zeal for God ought to be as fresh as if we had just begun to delight in him. "Ay, but it is not," says one; and I am sorry I cannot contradict him. After a few months a vigorous young Christian will begin to cool down; and those who have been long in the ways of God find

that final perseverance must be a miracle if ever it is to be accomplished, for naturally they tire and faint.

Well, now, dear friends, why do you and I ever get stale and flat? Why do we sing,

> "Dear Lord, and shall we ever live
> At this poor dying rate?"

Why do we have to cry—

> "In vain we tune our formal songs,
> In vain we strive to rise;
> Hosannas languish on our tongues,
> And our devotion dies"?

Why, it is because we get away from him who says, "Behold, I make all things new." The straight way to a perpetual newness and freshness of holy youth is to go to Christ again, just as we did at the first.

A better thing still is never to leave him, but to stand for ever at the cross-foot delighting yourself in his all-sufficient sacrifice. They that are full of the joy of the Lord never find life grow weary. They that walk in the light of his countenance can say of the Lord Jesus, "Thou hast the dew of thy youth"; and that dew falls upon those who dwell with him. Oh, I am sure that if we kept up perpetual communion with him, we should keep up a perpetual stream of delights.

> "Immortal joys come streaming down,
> Joys, like his griefs, immense, unknown;"

but these joys only come from him. We shall be young if we keep with the ever young and fresh Beloved, whose locks are bushy and black as a raven. He saith, and he performs the saying, "Behold, I make all things new."

He can make that next sermon of yours, my dear brother minister, quite new and interesting. He can make that prayer-meeting no longer a dreary affair, but quite a new thing to you and all the people. My dear sister, next time you go to your class, you may feel as if you had only just begun teaching. You will not be at all tired of your godly work, but love it better than ever. And you, my dear brother, at the corner of the street where you are often interrupted, perhaps, with foul language, you will feel that you are pleased with your position of self-denial. Getting near to Christ, you will partake in his joy, and that joy shall be your strength, your freshness, the newness of your life. God grant us to drink of the eternal founts, that we may for ever overflow.

And, further, dear friends, there may be some dear child of God here who is conscious that he lives on a very low platform of spiritual life, and he knows that the Lord can raise him to *a new condition.* Numbers of Christians seem to live in the marshes always. If you go through the valleys of Switzerland, you will find yourself get feverish and heavy in spirit, and you will see many idiots, persons with the goitre, and people greatly afflicted. Climb the sides of the hills, ascend into the Alps, and you will not meet with that kind of thing in the pure fresh air. Many Christians are of the sickly-valley breed. Oh that they could get up to the high mountains, and be strong!

I want to say to such, if you have been all your lifetime in bondage,

you need not remain there any longer; for there is in Jesus the power to make all things new, and to lift you into new delights. It will seem to be a dead lift to you; but it is within the power of that pierced hand to lift you right out of doubt, and fear, and despondency, and spiritual lethargy, and weakness, and just to make you now, from this day forward, "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

Now breathe a silent prayer, dear brother, dear sister, to him who makes all things new. "Lord, make thy poor, spiritually sick child to be strong in spiritual health." Oh, what a blessing it would be for some workers if God would make them strong! All the church would be the better because of the way in which the Lord would help them to do their work. Why should some of you be living at a penny a day and starving yourselves, when your Father would give you to live like princes of the blood royal if you would but trust him? I am persuaded that the most of us are beggars when we might be millionaires in spiritual things. And here is our strength for rising to a nobler state of mind, "Behold I make all things new."

Another application of this truth will be this:—"Oh," says one, "I do not know what to make of myself. I have had a weary time of late. Everything seems to have gone wrong with me. My family cause me great anxiety. My business is a thorny maze. My own health is precarious. I dread this year. In fact, I dread everything." We will not go on with that lamentation, but we will hear the cheering word,—"Behold, I make all things new." The Lord, in answer to believing prayer, and especially in answer to a full resignation to his will, is able to make *all providential surroundings new for you.* I have known the Lord on a sudden to turn darkness into light, and take away the sackcloth and the ashes from his dear children, for "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Sometimes all this worry is mere discontent; and when the child of God gets right himself, these imaginary troubles vanish like the mist of the morning; but when they are real troubles, God can as easily change your condition, dear child of God, as he can turn his hand. He can make your harsh and ungodly husband to become gentle and gracious. He can bring your children to bow at the family altar, and to rejoice with you in Christ. He can cause your business to prosper; or, if he does not do that, he can strengthen your back to bear the burden of your daily cross. Oh, it is wonderful how different a thing becomes when it is taken to God. But you want to make it all new yourself; and you fret and you worry, and you tease, and you trouble, and you make a burden of yourself. Why not leave that off, and in humble prayer take the matter to the Lord, and say, "Lord, appear for me, for thou hast said, 'I make all things new.' Make my circumstances new"? He is certainly able to turn your captivity as he turns the sun when it has reached the southern tropic.

Come, there is one more application, and that is that *the Lord can convert those dear friends about whose souls you have been so anxious.* The Lord who makes all things new can hear your prayers. One of the first prayers that I heard to-night in the prayer-meeting was by a dear brother that God would save his relatives. Then another with great tenderness prayed for his children. I knew it came from an aching heart.

Some of you have heart-breakers at home: the Lord break *their* hearts. You have grievous trouble because you hear the dearest that you have blaspheming the God you love. You know that they are Sabbath-breakers, and utterly godless, and you tremble for their eternal fate. Certain persons attend this Tabernacle—I do not see them to-night—but I can say of them that I never enter this pulpit without looking to their pews to see whether they are there, and breathing my heart to God for them. I forget a great many of you who are saved; but I always pray for *them*. And they will be brought in, I feel assured; but, oh, that it may be this year! I liked what a brother said at the church-meeting on Monday night, when his brother was introduced to the church. (Ah, there he sits.) I asked about his brother's conversion, and I said, "I suppose you were surprised to see him converted." He said, "I should have been very much surprised if he had not been." "But why, my dear brother?" I said. "Because I asked the Lord to convert him, and I kept on praying that he might be converted; and I should have been very much surprised if he had not been." That is the right sort of faith. I should be very much surprised if some of you that come here, time after time, are not converted. You shall be: blessed be God. We will give him no rest until he hears us. But come! Are we to be praying for you, and you not praying for yourselves? Do you not agree with our prayers? Oh, I trust you may. But, even if you do not, we shall pray for you; and if we were sure that you opposed our intercessions, and were even angry with them, we should pray all the more, for we mean to have you won for Jesus, by the grace of God, and you may as well come soon as late. We are bound to have you in the church confessing your faith in Jesus. We will never let you go, neither will we cease from our importunate prayers until we get an answer from the throne, and see you saved. Oh that you would yield on this first night of the year to him who can make new creatures of you. God grant you may!

The Lord answer our prayer now, for Jesus' sake, for we seek the salvation of every hearer and every reader of this sermon. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm ciii.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, DECEMBER 28TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."—Acts i. 10, 11.

FOUR great events shine out brightly in our Saviour's story. All Christian minds delight to dwell upon his birth, his death, his resurrection, and his ascension. These make four rounds in that ladder of light, the foot of which is upon the earth, but the top whereof reacheth to heaven. We could not afford to dispense with any one of those four events, nor would it be profitable for us to forget, or to under-estimate the value of any one of them. That the Son of God was born of a woman creates in us the intense delight of a brotherhood springing out of a common humanity. That Jesus once suffered unto the death for our sins, and thereby made a full atonement for us, is the rest and life of our spirits. The manger and the cross together are divine seals of love. That the Lord Jesus rose again from the dead is the warrant of our justification, and also a transcendently delightful assurance of the resurrection of all his people, and of their eternal life in him. Hath he not said, "Because I live ye shall live also"? The resurrection of Christ is the morning star of our future glory. Equally delightful is the remembrance of his ascension. No song is sweeter than this—"Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive, thou hast received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them."

Each one of those four events points to another, and they all lead up to it: the fifth link in the golden chain is our Lord's second and most glorious advent. Nothing is mentioned between his ascent and his descent. True, a rich history comes between; but it lies in a valley between two stupendous mountains: we step from alp to alp as we journey in meditation from the ascension to the second advent. I say that each of the previous four events points to it. Had he not come a first time in humiliation, born under the law, he could not have come

a second time in amazing glory "without a sin-offering unto salvation." Because he died once we rejoice that he dieth no more, death hath no more dominion over him, and therefore he cometh to destroy that last enemy whom he hath already conquered. It is our joy, as we think of our Redeemer as risen, to feel that in consequence of his rising the trump of the archangel shall assuredly sound for the awaking of all his slumbering people, when the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout. As for his ascension, he could not a second time descend if he had not first ascended; but having perfumed heaven with his presence, and prepared a place for his people, we may fitly expect that he will come again and receive us unto himself, that where he is there we may be also. I want you, therefore, as in contemplation you pass with joyful footsteps over these four grand events, as your faith leaps from his birth to his death, and from his resurrection to his ascension, to be looking forward, and even hastening unto this crowning fact of our Lord's history; for ere long he shall so come in like manner as he was seen go up into heaven.

This morning, in our meditation, we will start from the ascension; and if I had sufficient imagination I should like to picture our Lord and the eleven walking up the side of Olivet, communing as they went,—a happy company, with a solemn awe upon them, but with an intense joy in having fellowship with each other. Each disciple was glad to think that his dear Lord and Master who had been crucified was now among them, not only alive but surrounded with a mysterious safety and glory which none could disturb. The enemy was as still as a stone: not a dog moved his tongue: his bitterest foes made no sign during the days of our Lord's after-life below. The company moved onward peacefully towards Bethany—Bethany which they all knew and loved. The Saviour seemed drawn there at the time of his ascension, even as men's minds return to old and well-loved scenes when they are about to depart out of this world. His happiest moments on earth had been spent beneath the roof where lived Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Perhaps it was best for the disciples that he should leave them at that place where he had been most hospitably entertained, to show that he departed in peace and not in anger. There they had seen Lazarus raised from the dead by him who was now to be taken up from them: the memory of the triumphant past would help the tried faith of the present. There they had heard the voice saying, "Loose him, and let him go," and there they might fitly see their Lord loosed from all bonds of earthly gravitation that he might go to his Father and their Father. The memories of the place might help to calm their minds and arouse their spirits to that fulness of joy which ought to attend the glorifying of their Lord.

But they have come to a standstill, having reached the brow of the hill. The Saviour stands conspicuously in the centre of the group, and, following upon most instructive discourse, he pronounces a blessing upon them. He lifts his pierced hands, and while he is lifting them and is pronouncing words of love, he begins to rise from the earth. He has risen above them all to their astonishment! In a moment he has passed beyond the olives, which seem with their silvery sheen to be lit up by his milder radiance. While the disciples are looking, the Lord has

ascended into mid-air, and speedily he has risen to the regions of the clouds. They stand spell-bound with astonishment, and suddenly a bright cloud, like a chariot of God, bears him away. That cloud conceals him from mortal gaze. Though we have known Christ after the flesh, now after the flesh know we him no more. They are riveted to the spot, very naturally so: they linger long in the place, they stand with streaming eyes, wonder-struck, still looking upward.

It is not the Lord's will that they should long remain inactive; their reverie is interrupted. They might have stood there till wonder saddened into fear. As it was, they remained long enough; for the angel's words may be accurately rendered, "Why have ye stood, gazing up into heaven?"

Their lengthened gaze needed to be interrupted, and, therefore, two shining ones, such as aforetime met the women at the sepulchre, are sent to them. These messengers of God appear in human form that they may not alarm them, and in white raiment as if to remind them that all was bright and joyous; and these white-robed ministers stood with them as if they would willingly join their company. As no one of the eleven would break silence, the men in white raiment commenced the discourse. Addressing them in the usual celestial style, they asked a question which contained its own answer, and then went on to tell their message. As they had once said to the women, "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen;" so did they now say, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." The angels showed their knowledge of them by calling them "men of Galilee," and reminded them that they were yet upon earth by recalling their place of birth. Brought back to their senses, their reverie over, the apostles at once gird up their loins for active service; they do not need twice telling, but hasten to Jerusalem. The vision of angels has singularly enough brought them back into the world of actual life again, and they obey the command, "Tarry ye at Jerusalem." They seem to say,—the taking up of our Master is not a thing to weep about: he has gone to his throne and to his glory, and he said it was expedient for us that he should go away. He will now send us the promise of the Father; we scarcely know what it will be like, but let us, in obedience to his will, make the best of our way to the place where he bade us await the gift of power. Do you not see them going down the side of Olivet, taking that Sabbath-day's journey into the cruel and wicked city without a thought of fear; having no dread of the bloodthirsty crew who slew their Lord, but happy in the memory of their Lord's exaltation and in the expectation of a wonderful display of his power. They held fellowship of the most delightful kind with one another, and anon entered into the upper room, where in protracted prayer and communion they waited for the promise of the Father. You see I have no imagination: I have barely mentioned the incidents in the simplest language. Yet try and realise the scene, for it will be helpful so to do, since our Lord Jesus is to come in like manner as the disciples saw him go up into heaven.

My first business this morning will be to consider *the gentle chiding* administered by the shining ones:—"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye

gazing up unto heaven?" Secondly, *the cheering description* of our Lord which the white-robed messengers used,—"This same Jesus"; and then, thirdly, *the practical truth* which they taught—"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."

I. First, then, here is A GENTLE CHIDING. It is not sharply uttered by men dressed in black who use harsh speech, and upbraid the servants of God severely for what was rather a mistake than a fault. No; the language is strengthening, yet tender: the fashion of a question allows them rather to reprove themselves than to be reproved; and the tone is that of brotherly love, and affectionate concern.

Notice, that *what these saintly men were doing seems at first sight to be very right.* Methinks, if Jesus were among us now we would fix our eyes upon him, and never withdraw them. He is altogether lovely, and it would seem wicked to yield our eyesight to any inferior object so long as he was to be seen. When he ascended up into heaven it was the duty of his friends to look upon him. It can never be wrong to look up; we are often bidden to do so, and it is even a holy saying of the Psalmist, "I will direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up"; and, again, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." If it be right to look up into heaven, it must be still more right to look up while Jesus rises to the place of his glory. Surely it had been wrong if they had looked anywhere else,—it was due to the Lamb of God that they should behold him as long as eyes could follow him. He is the Sun: where should eyes be turned but to his light? He is the King; and where should courtiers within the palace gate turn their eyes but to their King as he ascends to his throne? The truth is, there was nothing wrong in their looking up into heaven; but they went a little further than looking; they stood "gazing." A little excess in right may be faulty. It may be wise to look, but foolish to gaze. There is a very thin partition sometimes between that which is commendable and that which is censurable. There is a golden mean which it is not easy to keep. The exact path of right is often as narrow as a razor's edge, and he must be wise that doth not err either on the right hand or on the left. "Look" is ever the right word. Why, it is "Look unto me, and be saved." Look, aye, look steadfastly and intently: be your posture that of one "looking unto Jesus," always throughout life. But there is a gazing which is not commendable, when the look becomes not that of reverent worship, but of an overweening curiosity; when there mingles with the desire to know what should be known, a prying into that which it is for God's glory to conceal. Brethren, it is of little use to look up into an empty heaven. If Christ himself be not visible in heaven, then in vain do we gaze, since there is nothing for a saintly eye to see. When the person of Jesus was gone out of the azure vault above them, and the cloud had effectually concealed him, why should they continue to gaze when God himself had drawn the curtain? If infinite wisdom had withdrawn the object upon which they desired to gaze, what would their gazing be but a sort of reflection upon the wisdom which had removed their Lord? Yet it did seem very right. Thus certain things that you and I may do may appear right, and yet we may need to be chidden out of them into some-

thing better: they may be right in themselves, but not appropriate for the occasion, not seasonable, nor expedient. They may be right up to a point, and then may touch the boundary of excess. A steadfast gaze into heaven may be to a devout soul a high order of worship, but if this filled up much of our working time it might become the idlest form of folly.

Yet I cannot help adding that *it was very natural.* I do not wonder that the whole eleven stood gazing up, for if I had been there I am sure I should have done the same. How struck they must have been with the ascent of the Master out of their midst! You would be amazed if some one from among our own number now began to ascend into heaven! Would you not? Our Lord did not gradually melt away from sight as a phantom, or dissolve into thin air as a mere apparition: the Saviour did not disappear in that way at all, but he rose, and they saw that it was his very self that was so rising. His own body, the materialism in which he had veiled himself, actually, distinctly, and literally, rose to heaven before their eyes. I repeat, the Lord did not dissolve, and disappear like a vision of the night, but he evidently rose till the cloud intervened so that they could see him no more. I think I should have stood looking to the very place where his cloudy chariot had been. I know it would be idle to continue so to do, but our hearts often urge us on to acts which we could not justify logically. Hearts are not to be argued with. Sometimes you stand by a grave where one is buried whom you dearly loved: you go there often to weep. You cannot help it, the place is precious to you; yet you could not prove that you do any good by your visits, perhaps you even injure yourself thereby, and deserve to be gently chidden with the question, "why?" It may be the most natural thing in the world, and yet it may not be a wise thing. The Lord allows us to do that which is innocently natural, but he will not have us carry it too far; for then it might foster an evil nature. Hence he sends an interrupting messenger: not an angel with a sword, or even a rod; but he sends some man in white raiment,—I mean one who is both cheerful and holy, and he, by his conduct or his words, suggests to us the question, "Why stand ye here gazing?" *Cui bono?* What will be the benefit? What will it avail? Thus our understanding being called into action, and we being men of thought, we answer to ourselves, "This will not do. We must not stand gazing here for ever," and therefore we arouse ourselves to get back to the Jerusalem of practical life, where in the power of God we hope to do service for our Master.

Notice, then, that the disciples were doing that which seemed to be right, and what was evidently very natural, but that it is very easy to carry the apparently right and the absolutely natural too far. Let us take heed to ourselves, and often ask our hearts, "Why?"

For, thirdly, notice that what they *did was not after all justifiable upon strict reason.* While Christ was going up it was proper that they should adoringly look at him. He might almost have said, "If ye see me when I am taken up a double portion of my spirit shall rest upon you." They did well to look where he led the way. But when he was gone, still to remain gazing was an act which they could not exactly explain to themselves, and could not justify to others. Put the question thus:—"What

purpose will be fulfilled by your continuing to gaze into the sky? He is gone, it is absolutely certain that he is gone. He is taken up, and God himself has manifestly concealed all trace of him by bidding yonder cloud sail in between him and you. Why gaze ye still? He told you 'I go unto my Father.' Why stand and gaze?" We may under the influence of great love, act unwisely. I remember well seeing the action of a woman whose only son was emigrating to a distant colony. I stood in the station, and I noticed her many tears and her frequent embraces of her boy; but the train came up and he entered the carriage. After the train had passed beyond the station, she was foolish enough to break away from friends who sought to detain her; she ran along the platform, leaped down upon the railroad and pursued the flying train. It was natural, but it had been better left undone. What was the use of it? We had better abstain from acts which serve no practical purpose; for in this life we have neither time nor strength to waste in fruitless action. The disciples would be wise to cease gazing, for nobody would be benefitted by it, and they would not themselves be blessed. What is the use of gazing when there is nothing to see. Well, then, did the angels ask, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

Again, put another question,—What precept were they obeying when they stood gazing up into heaven? If you have a command from God to do a certain thing, you need not inquire into the reason of the command, it is disobedient to begin to canvas God's will; but when there is no precept whatever, why persevere in an act which evidently does not promise to bring any blessing? Who bade them stand gazing up into heaven? If Christ had done so, then in Christ's name let them stand like statues and never turn their heads: but as he had not bidden them, why did they do what he had not commanded, and leave undone what he had commanded? For he had strictly charged them that they should tarry at Jerusalem till they were "endued with power from on high." So what they did was not justifiable.

Here is the practical point for us:—*What they did we are very apt to imitate.* "Oh," say you, "I shall never stand gazing up into heaven." I am not sure of that. Some Christians are very curious, but not obedient. Plain precepts are neglected, but difficult problems they seek to solve. I remember one who used always to be dwelling upon the vials and seals and trumpets. He was great at apocalyptic symbols; but he had seven children, and he had no family prayer. If he had left the vials and trumpets and minded his boys and girls, it would have been a deal better. I have known men marvellously great upon Daniel, and specially instructed in Ezekiel, but singularly forgetful of the twentieth of Exodus, and not very clear upon Romans the eighth. I do not speak with any blame of such folks for studying Daniel and Ezekiel, but quite the reverse; yet I wish they had been more zealous for the conversion of the sinners in their neighbourhoods, and more careful to assist the poor saints. I admit the value of the study of the feet of the image in Nebuchadnezzar's vision, and the importance of knowing the kingdoms which make up the ten toes, but I do not see the propriety of allowing such studies to overlay the common-places of practical godliness. If the time spent over obscure theological propositions were given to a mission in the dim alley near the good man's house, more

benefit would come to man and more glory to God. I would have you understand all mysteries, brethren, if you could ; but do not forget that our chief business here below is to cry, "Behold the Lamb!" By all manner of means read and search till you know all that the Lord has revealed concerning things to come ; but first of all see to it that your children are brought to the Saviour's feet, and that you are workers together with God in the upbuilding of his church. The dense mass of misery and ignorance and sin which is round about us on every side demands all our powers ; and if you do not respond to the call, though I am not a man in white apparel, I shall venture to say to you, "Ye men of Christendom, why stand ye gazing up into the mysteries when so much is to be done for Jesus, and you are leaving it undone?" O ye who are curious but not obedient, I fear I speak to you in vain, but I have spoken. May the Holy Spirit also speak.

Others are contemplative but not active,—much given to the study of Scripture and to meditation thereon, but not zealous for good works. Contemplation is so scarce in these days that I could wish there were a thousand times as much of it ; but in the case to which I refer everything runs in the one channel of thought, all time is spent in reading, in enjoyment, in rapture, in pious leisure. Religion never ought to become the subject of selfishness, and yet I fear some treat it as if its chief end was spiritual gratification. When a man's religion all lies in his saving his own self, and in enjoying holy things for his own self, there is a disease upon him. When his judgment of a sermon is based upon the one question, "Did it feed *me?*" it is a swinish judgment. There is such a thing as getting a swinish religion in which you are yourself first, yourself second, yourself third, yourself to the utmost end. Did Jesus ever think or speak in that fashion? Contemplation of Christ himself may be so carried out as to lead you away from Christ : the recluse meditates on Jesus, but he is as unlike the busy self-denying Jesus as well can be. Meditation unattended with active service in the spreading of the gospel among men, well deserves the rebuke of the angel, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

Moreover, some are careful and anxious and deliriously impatient for some marvellous interposition. We get at times into a sad state of mind, because we do not see the kingdom of Christ advancing as we desire. I suppose it is with you as it is with me,—I begin to fret, and I am deeply troubled, and I feel that there is good reason that I should be, for truth is fallen in the streets, and the days of blasphemy and rebuke are upon us. Then we pine ; for the Master is away, and we cry, "When will he be back again? Oh, why are his chariots so long in coming? Why tarries he through the ages?" Our desires sour into impatience, and we commence gazing up into heaven, looking for his coming with a restlessness which does not allow us to discharge our duty as we should. Whenever anybody gets into that state, this is the word, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?"

In certain cases this uneasiness has drawn to itself a wrong expectation of immediate wonders, and an intense desire for sign-seeing. Ah me, what fanaticisms come of this! In America years ago, one came forward who declared that on such a day the Lord would come, and he led a great company to believe his crazy predictions. Many took their

horses and fodder for two or three days, and went out into the woods, expecting to be all the more likely to see all that was to be seen when once away from the crowded city. All over the States there were people who had made ascension-dresses in which to soar into the air in proper costume. They waited, and they waited, and I am sure that no text could have been more appropriate for them than this, "Ye men of America, why stand ye here gazing up into heaven?" Nothing came of it; and yet there are thousands in England and America who only need a fanatical leader, and they would run into the like folly. The desire to know the times and seasons is a craze with many poor bodies whose insanity runs in that particular groove. Every occurrence is a "sign of the times": a sign, I may add, which they do not understand. An earthquake is a special favourite with them. "Now," they cry, "the Lord is coming"; as if there had not been earthquakes of the sort we have heard of lately hundreds of times since our Lord went up into heaven. When the prophetic earthquakes occur in divers places, we shall know of it without the warnings of these brethren. What a number of persons have been infatuated by the number of the beast, and have been ready to leap for joy because they have found the number 666 in some great one's name. Why, everybody's name will yield that number if you treat it judiciously, and use the numerals of Greece, Rome, Egypt, China, or Timbuctoo. I feel weary with the silly way in which some people make toys out of Scripture, and play with texts as with a pack of cards. Whenever you meet with a man who sets up to be a prophet, keep out of his way in the future; and when you hear of signs and wonders, turn you to your Lord, and in patience possess your souls. "The just shall live by his faith." There is no other way of living among wild enthusiasts. Believe in God, and ask not for miracles and marvels, or the knowledge of times and seasons. To know when the Lord will restore the kingdom is not in your power. Remember that verse which I read just now in your hearing,—"It is not for you to know the times or the seasons." If I were introduced into a room where a large number of parcels were stored up, and I was told that there was something good for me, I should begin to look for that which had my name upon it, and when I came upon a parcel and I saw in pretty big letters, "*It is not for you*," I should leave it alone. Here, then, is a casket of knowledge marked, "*It is not for you* to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Cease to meddle with matters which are concealed, and be satisfied to know the things which are clearly revealed.

II. Secondly, I want you to notice THE CHEERING DESCRIPTION which these bright spirits give concerning our Lord. They describe him thus,—"This same Jesus."

I appreciate the description the more because *it came from those who knew him.* "He was seen of angels"; they had watched him all his life long, and they knew him, and when they, having just seen him rise to his Father and his God, said of him, "This same Jesus," then I know by an infallible testimony that he was the same, and that he is the same.

Jesus is gone, but he still exists. He has left us, but he is not dead; he has not dissolved into nothing like the mist of the morning. "This

same Jesus" is gone up unto his Father's throne, and he is there to-day as certainly as he once stood at Pilate's bar. As surely as he did hang upon the cross, so surely does he, the self-same man, sit upon the throne of God and reign over creation. I like to think of the positive identity of the Christ in the seventh heaven with the Christ in the lowest deeps of agony. The Christ they spat upon is now the Christ whose name the cherubim and seraphim are hymning day without night. The Christ they scourged is he before whom principalities and powers delight to cast their crowns. Think of it and be glad this morning; and do not stand gazing up into heaven after a myth or a dream. Jesus lives; mind that you live also. Do not loiter as if you had nothing at all to do, or as if the kingdom of God had come to an end because Jesus is gone from the earth, as to his bodily presence. It is not all over; he still lives, and he has given you a work to do till he comes. Therefore, go and do it.

"This same Jesus"—I love that word, for "Jesus" means *a Saviour*. Oh, ye anxious sinners here present, the name of him who has gone up into his glory is full of invitation to you! Will you not come to "this same Jesus"? This is he who opened the eyes of the blind and brought forth the prisoners out of the prison-house. He is doing the same thing to-day. Oh that your eyes may see his light! He that touched the lepers, and that raised the dead, is the same Jesus still, able to save to the uttermost. Oh that you may look and live! You have only to come to him by faith, as she did who touched the hem of his garment; you have but to cry to him as the blind man did whose sight he restored; for he is the same Jesus, bearing about with him the same tender love for guilty men, and the same readiness to receive and cleanse all that come to him by faith.

"This same Jesus." Why, that must have meant that he who is in heaven is the same Christ who was on earth, but it must also mean that *he who is to come will be the same Jesus that went up into heaven.* There is no change in our blessed Master's nature, nor will there ever be. There is a great change in his condition:

> **"The Lord shall come, but not the same**
> **As once in lowliness he came,**
> **A humble man before his foes,**
> **A weary man, and full of woes."**

He will be "the same Jesus" in nature though not in condition: he will possess the same tenderness when he comes to judge, the same gentleness of heart when all the glories of heaven and earth shall gird his brow. Our eye shall see him in that day, and we shall recognize him not only by the nail-prints, but by the very look of his countenance, by the character that gleams from that marvellous face; and we shall say, "'Tis he! 'tis he! the self-same Christ that went up from the top of Olivet from the midst of his disciples." Go to him with your troubles, as you would have done when he was here. Look forward to his second coming without dread. Look for him with that joyous expectancy with which you would welcome Jesus of Bethany, who loved Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus.

On the back of that sweet title came this question, "Why stand ye here gazing into heaven?" They might have said, "We stay here

because we do not know where to go. Our Master is gone." But oh, it is the same Jesus, and he is coming again, so go down to Jerusalem and get to work directly. Do not worry yourselves; no grave accident has occurred; it is not a disaster that Christ has gone, but an advance in his work. Despisers tell us nowadays, "Your cause is done for! Christianity is spun out! Your divine Christ is gone; we have not seen a trace of his miracle-working hand, nor of that voice which no man could rival." Here is our answer: We are not standing gazing up into heaven, we are not paralyzed because Jesus is away. He lives, the great Redeemer lives; and though it is our delight to lift up our eyes because we expect his coming, it is equally our delight to turn our heavenly gazing into an earthward watching, and to go down into the city, and there to tell that Jesus is risen, that men are to be saved by faith in him, and that whosoever believeth in him shall have everlasting life. We are not defeated, far from it: his ascension is not a retreat, but an advance. His tarrying is not for want of power, but because of the abundance of his long-suffering. The victory is not questionable. All things work for it; all the hosts of God are mustering for the final charge. This same Jesus is mounting his white horse to lead forth the armies of heaven, conquering and to conquer.

III. Our third point is this, THE GREAT PRACTICAL TRUTH. This truth is not one that is to keep us gazing into heaven, but one that is to make each of us go to his house to render earnest service. What is it?

Why, first, that *Jesus in gone into heaven.* Jesus is gone! Jesus is gone! It sounds like a knell. Jesus is taken up from you into heaven! —that sounds like a marriage peal. He is gone, but he is gone up to the hills whence he can survey the battle; up to the throne, from which he can send us succour. The reserve forces of the omnipotent stood waiting till their Captain came, and now that he is come into the centre of the universe, he can send legions of angels, or he can raise up hosts of men for the help of his cause. I see every reason for going down into the world and getting to work, for he is gone up into heaven and "all power is given unto him in heaven and in earth." Is not that a good argument—"Go ye *therefore* and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"?

Jesus will come again. That is another reason for girding our loins, because it is clear that he has not quitted the fight, nor deserted the field of battle. Our great Captain is still heading the conflict; he has ridden into another part of the field, but he will be back again, perhaps in the twinkling of an eye. You do not say that a commander has given up the campaign because it is expedient that he should withdraw from your part of the field. Our Lord is doing the best thing for his kingdom in going away. It was in the highest degree expedient that he should go, and that we should each one receive the Spirit. There is a blessed unity between Christ the King and the commonest soldier in the ranks. He has not taken his heart from us, nor his care from us, nor his interest from us: he is bound up heart and soul with his people, and their holy warfare, and this is the evidence of it, "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

Then, moreover, we are told in the text—and this is a reason why we

should get to our work—that *he is coming in like manner as he departed.* Certain of the commentators do not seem to understand English at all. "He which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven,"—this, they say, relates to his spiritual coming at Pentecost. Give anybody a grain of sense, and do they not see that a spiritual coming is not a coming in the same manner in which he went up into heaven? There is an analogy, but certainly not a likeness between the two things. Our Lord was taken up; they could see him rise: he will come again, and "every eye shall see him." He went up not in spirit, but in person: he will come down in person. "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner." He went up as a matter of fact: not in poetic figure and spiritual symbol, but as a matter of fact,—"This same Jesus" literally went up. "This same Jesus" will literally come again. He will descend in clouds even as he went up in clouds; and "he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth" even as he stood aforetime. He went up to heaven unopposed; no high priests, nor scribes, nor Pharisees, nor even one of the rabble opposed his ascension; it were ridiculous to suppose that they could; and when he comes a second time none will stand against him. His adversaries shall perish; as the fat of rams shall they melt away in his presence. When he cometh he shall break rebellious nations with a rod of iron, for his force shall be irresistible in that day.

Brethren, do not let anybody spiritualize away all this from you. Jesus is coming as a matter of fact, therefore go down to your sphere of service as a matter of fact. Get to work and teach the ignorant, win the wayward, instruct the children, and everywhere tell out the sweet name of Jesus. As a matter of fact, give of your substance and don't talk about it. As a matter of fact, consecrate your daily life to the glory of God. As a matter of fact, live wholly for your Redeemer. Jesus is not coming in a sort of mythical, misty, hazy way, he is literally and actually coming, and he will literally and actually call upon you to give an account of your stewardship. Therefore, now, to-day, literally not symbolically, personally and not by deputy, go out through that portion of the world which you can reach, and preach the gospel to every creature according as you have opportunity.

For this is what the men in white apparel meant—*be ready to meet your coming Lord.* What is the way to be ready to meet Jesus? If it is the same Jesus that went away from us who is coming, then let us be doing what he was doing before he went away. If it is the same Jesus that is coming we cannot possibly put ourselves into a posture of which he will better approve than by going about doing good. If you would meet him with joy, serve him with earnestness. If the Lord Jesus Christ were to come to-day I should like him to find me at my studying, praying, or preaching. Would you not like him to find you in your Sunday-school, in your class, or out there at the corner of the street preaching, or doing whatever you have the privilege of doing in his name? Would you meet your Lord in idleness? Do not think of it. I called one day on one of our members, and she was whitening the front steps. She got up all in confusion; she said, "Oh dear, sir, I did not know you were coming to-day, or I would have been ready." I replied, "Dear friend, you could not be in better trim than

you are: you are doing your duty like a good housewife, and may God bless you." She had no money to spare for a servant, and she was doing her duty by keeping the home tidy: I thought she looked more beautiful with her pail beside her than if she had been dressed according to the latest fashion. I said to her, "When the Lord Jesus Christ comes suddenly, I hope he will find me doing as you were doing, namely, fulfilling the duty of the hour." I want you all to get to your pails without being ashamed of them. Serve the Lord in some way or other; serve him always; serve him intensely; serve him more and more. Go to-morrow and serve the Lord at the counter, or in the workshop, or in the field. Go and serve the Lord by helping the poor and the needy, the widow and the fatherless; serve him by teaching the children, especially by endeavouring to train your own children. Go and hold a temperance meeting, and show the drunkard that there is hope for him in Christ, or go to the midnight meeting and let the fallen woman know that Jesus can restore her. Do what Jesus has given you the power to do, and then, ye men of Britain, ye will not stand gazing up into heaven, but you will wait upon the Lord in prayer, and you will receive the Spirit of God, and you will publish to all around the doctrine of "Believe and live." Then when he comes he will say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." So may his grace enable us to do. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xxiv. 49—53 Acts i. 1—12.

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THE SONG OF A CITY, AND THE PEARL OF PEACE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JANUARY 4TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."—Isaiah xxvi. 3.

THIS is no dry, didactic statement, but a verse from a song. We are among the poets of revelation, who did not compose ballads for the passing hour, but made sonnets for the people of God to sing in after days. I quote to you a stanza from "the song of a city." Judah has not aforetime thus chanted before her God, but she has much to learn, and one day she shall learn this psalm also:—"We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Into the open country the adversary easily advances, but walled cities are a check upon the invading foe. Those people who had been hurried to and fro as captives, and had frequently been robbed of their property by invaders, were glad when they saw builded among them a city, a well-defended city, which should be the centre of their race, and the shield of their nation.

This song of a city may, however, belong to us as much as to the men of Judah, and we may throw into it a deeper sense of which they were not aware. We were once unguarded from spiritual evil, and we spent our days in constant fear; but the Lord has found for us a city of defence, a castle of refuge. We have a burgess-ship in the new Jerusalem which is the mother of us all; and within that strong city we dwell securely. Let us sing this morning, "We have a strong city." The man that hath come into fellowship with God through the atoning sacrifice, hath gotten into a place of perfect safety, where he may dwell, ay, dwell for ever, without fear of assault. We are no longer hunted by hosts of fears, and trodden down by dark despairs; but "We have a strong city" which overawes the foe, and quiets ourselves. Our gospel hymns are the songs of men who, in the truest spiritual sense, have seen an end of alarm, by accepting God's provision against trouble of heart.

Observe how the song goes on to dilate upon the city's strength. "Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks." Our refuge will repay a close examination. We are doubly defended. Its lofty walls are the mainstay of a city's security; when they are strong, and high, they keep out the foe, whether he assail by scaling-ladder, or battering-

engine. Outside the wall, on the other side of the moat, lies what is called the bulwark; the earthwork where, in times of peace, the citizens delight to take their walks. The bulwark of their confidence is the *boulevard* of their communion. The Lord our God has set ring upon ring, defence upon defence, around his people. All the powers of providence and of grace protect the saints. Material and spiritual forces alike surround her. The Lord keeps his people doubly fenced by walls and bulwarks, and hence he speaks of a double peace. "Thou wilt keep him in peace, peace," saith the Hebrew. God does nothing by halves, but everything by doubles. His salvation is decreed and appointed, and this is made the basis for the unbroken serenity of all his chosen.

The song, however, does not end with verses concerning the city, but it conducts us within its walls. "Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in." Entrance into this grace, wherein we stand, is a choice privilege. The greatest joy of true godliness lies in our being able to enter into it. If the City of God were shut against us, it were sad, indeed, for us. If, to-day, you and I were outside of her, of what value would her walls and bulwarks be to us? Whatever God has done to his people, it is just so much additional sorrow rather than increased joy to ourselves if we are not partakers therein. That there should be a Christ, and that I should be Christless; that there should be a cleansing, and I should remain foul; that there should be a Father's love, and I should be an alien; that there should be a heaven, and I should be cast into hell, is grief embittered, sorrow aggravated. Come, then, let us sing of personal entrance into the City of God. The music and the feasting are not outside the door: to enjoy them we must enter in. Our citizenship is now in heaven. Nothing is barred against us, for the Son of David has set before us an open door, and no man can shut it. Let us not neglect our opportunities. Let it not be said, "They could not enter in because of unbelief." No, let it be ours to sing of salvation because we enjoy it to the full. Let our music never cease.

Now, when we get as far as this,—a strong city, and a city into which we have entered, we are still further glad to learn who the keeper and garrison of that city may be, for a city needs to be kept while there are so many foes abroad. To render all secure there needs to be some leader and commander for the people, who has strength with which to man the walls, and drive off besiegers. Our text tells us how securely this strong city will be held—so securely that none of her citizens shall ever be disturbed in heart,—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee."

Permit me to remind you again that my text is the verse of a song. I earnestly desire you to feel like singing all the time while I am preaching, and let the words of the text ring in your heart with deep mysterious chimes, as of a land beyond these clouds and tempests,—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." I do not want you to be thinking, "I wish that the Lord would keep me in peace;" I would have you now enter into rest before the Lord. Do not say, "I am fretting and worrying, because I cannot reach this peace;" but pray to enjoy it this morning. O Lord and Giver of peace, vouchsafe it to our faith at once! O ye trustful ones,

enter at once into the opened gates of the city of peace, and then bless God that you cannot be driven out again, for the Lord promises to be your garrison and safeguard. May the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter, and whose fruit is peace, now work peace in each of us!

I. First, we are going to answer this question as best we can, WHAT IS THIS PERFECT PEACE? The text in the original, as I have told you, is—"Thou will keep him in peace, peace." It is the Hebrew way of expressing emphatic peace; true and real peace; double peace, peace of great depth and vast extent. Many of you know what it is; and you will probably think my answer a very poor one. I shall give the best I can, I can do no more; and if you try to make up for my deficiencies, our brethren will be gainers. I confess that I cannot to the full describe the peace that may be enjoyed if our faith is strong, and our confidence in God has reached its appropriate height. We are not limited as to quality or measure of this precious thing. Peace is a jewel of so rare a price that he only hath valued it aright who has sold all that he hath to buy it. Describe it? Nay, verily, there we fail.

This "peace, peace" means, I think, *an absence of all war, and of all alarm of war.* You who can imagine the full meaning of siege, storm, sack, and pillage, can also guess the happier state of things when a city hears no longer the tramp of armies, when from her ramparts and towers no sign of adversary can be discovered; but all is peace. That is very much the condition of the people of God when the Lord keepeth them in peace. God himself, at one time, seemed to be against us: the ten great cannon of his Law were turned against our walls; all heaven and earth mustered for battle; God himself was against us, at least, so conscience reported from her look-out. But, now, at this moment, having believed in Jesus Christ, we have entered into rest, and we have perfect peace as to our former sins. Who is he that can harm you, O ye that are reconciled to God? "If God be for us, who can be against us?" "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" We have by faith arrived at a state of perfect reconciliation with God. The divine Fatherhood has covered us. We inherit the spirit of children, the spirit of love and of unquestioning confidence. Everything is quiet, for we dwell in our Father's house. Look upward, and you will perceive no seat of fiery wrath to shoot devouring flame. Look downward, and you discover no hell, for there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. Look back, and sin is blotted out. Look around, and all things work together for good to them that love God. Look beyond, and glory shineth through the veil of the future, like the sun through a morning's mist. Look outward, and the stones of the field, and the beasts of the field, are at peace with us. Look inward, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keeps our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. The Lord leadeth us by still waters at such happy times, along that road of which we read, "No lion shall be there." If you who are believers in Jesus do not usually enjoy this peace, the blame must be laid to your own door: you make your own disquietude, for God saith to you, "Peace, peace," and he will keep you there if your mind is stayed on him. Happy is he whose conflict is ended, and whose warfare is accomplished by faith in Christ Jesus.

Further, *this perfect peace reigns over all things within its circle.* Not

only is no enemy near, but the inhabitants of the city are all at rest, and all their affairs are happy. No man can be said to be at *perfect* peace who has any cause of disquietude at all. Yet the child of God has this perfect peace according to our Lord's own statement; and, therefore, it must be true that the believer is raised above all disquietude. "What," say you, "has he not an evil heart of unbelief?" Yes, and that demands his watchfulness, but should not create in him any kind of terror, for "God is greater than our hearts," and where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound. The flesh has received its death-warrant, and unbelief is but a part of the flesh doomed to die. The holy life within us must triumph. "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself." Though we be as yet like the smoking flax, we shall soon shine forth, and he will bring forth judgment unto victory. "Ah," saith one, "but I have disquietude in my family: I have a wild, unruly son;" or, "I have a sick, pining child, who will soon be taken away from me by consumption!" Yes, friend, but if your mind is stayed on God, and you can trust God with such matters, you should not lose your perfect peace even through this. For, what if your heart be troubled? Will that make the consumptive child any the stronger? Or will your melancholy be likely to restrain your rebellious son? No, but "The just shall live by faith," and shall triumph by faith, too. It shall be your strength to bring your sick, and lay them at Jesus' feet; it shall be your hope to bring your unruly one, and say, "Lord, cast out the devil from my child, and let him live unto thee." Nothing ought to avail to break the peace of the believer; the shield of faith should quench every fiery dart. For, observe, that your sin is forgiven you for Christ's sake, and that is done once for all. Observe, that Christ has taken possession of you, and you are his; neither will he lose you, but he will hold you single-handed against the world, and death, and hell. Observe, too, that your heavenly Father rules in providence, giving you what you need, for he has said, "No good thing will I withhold from them that walk uprightly." He reigns in power, anticipating every danger, for he hath declared, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." God's peace covers the whole extent of the territory. Tell it out through every street of Mansoul that the Prince Emmanuel has come, and to every creature within the city walls the peace of God is granted, to be possessed with gladness and delight.

We are getting some idea, I trust, of this peace, though words cannot fully convey it; we must know it for ourselves. Yet it is pleasant to note that this peace is deeply real and true. No perfect peace can be enjoyed unless *every secret cause of fear is met and removed.* Whisper it at the gates, and in the hostelries, that the city might be taken by surprise, and that spies had been seen in the meadows, down by the East gate; and straightway the city would be in a ferment. No; peace cannot breathe while suspicion haunts the streets. Our peace may be a false peace, a fool's peace; we may be lulled into a carnal security. Politically, nations have become self-confident, have dreamed of peace when the forges were ringing with the hammers of war; and so ill has happened unto them. Spiritually, there are multitudes of

persons who think that all is right with their souls, when, indeed, all is wrong, for eternity. It is to be feared that some have received a "strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." Now, we cannot call that perfect peace which lies only on the surface, and will not bear to be looked into. We desire a peace which sits in open court, and neither blindfolds nor muzzles ambassadors. The peace which requires that there should be a hushing-up of this and of that is an evil thing. Such is the direct opposite of the peace of God. If there be any charge against God's people, men are challenged to bring it,—"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" The pardon which God gives us is not a smothering-up of our sins, nor a blinding of justice. God is as just in his pardons as in his punishments. It shall be seen at the last, when believers enter into their glory, that they rise there by law, just as surely as the lost sink down to hell by law: that is to say, that the Lord Jesus Christ hath rendered to the law such recompense by his perfect obedience, and his matchless atonement, that it shall be as just on God's part to save his elect as to condemn the unbelieving world. We claim that our peace is just and right. It may be examined and tested; for here we have NO FICTION. If truth is to be found beneath the stars, it is in the peace which comes through the precious blood of the Son of God. The peace which God gives goes to the very bottom of things, and brings us into the eternal harmonies.

We may gaze upon this truth with the most attentive eye, but we shall see only the more clearly that he that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ hath salvation for walls and bulwarks. Under any light believers in Jesus are secure. You may be put in circumstances of a very trying kind, especially you may be brought to the brink of death, and near to the bar of God; and yet, dear friend, the God in whom you trust will not fail you. Your heart rests on his promises and faithfulness, and there is no reason why its peace should be broken.

Is not this a perfect peace? If I stood here to preach up a sort of enthusiastic confidence, which would not bear the test, I would be ashamed of myself; but in preaching this peace of God, which passeth all understanding, which has no back-reckonings to disturb it, which has nothing behind that can come in ultimately to break it up, I preach something worth the having. I do desire and pray that every man and woman here may know it as I know it; for I have peace with God, and therefore my heart is glad. Oh that all of you here present might now believe God, and stay yourselves upon him; then would you hear the Lord say "Peace! peace!"

One thing more, *peace in a city would not be consistent with the stoppage of commerce.* During perfect peace intercourse goes on with all surrounding places, and the city by its trade is enriched. Where there is perfect peace with God, commerce prospers between the soul and heaven. Good men commune with the good, and thereby their sense of peace increases. If you have perfect peace, you have fellowship with all the saints: personal jealousies, sectarian bitternesses, and unholy emulations are all laid aside. Oh, it is a happy state of mind when we have no prejudices which can keep an heir of heaven out of our heart, no peculiarities which can wall out the godly from fellowship with us! Oh, how blessed to say spontaneously, "If he is a child of God, I love him;

if he is a member of the heavenly family, he is my brother, and I welcome him!" When we are at one with all the people of God, we are quit of a world of wars.

Better still, there is a sweet peace between the heart and its God when from day to day, by prayer and praise, we commune with the Most High. Any peace that is linked with forgetfulness of God is a horrible thing: it is the peace of the miasma, which is brooding in quiet before it strikes with the arrow of death; it is that dead calm which precedes the cyclone or the earthquake. The perfect peace which God giveth sunneth itself in the presence of God; it is a tropical flower, which lives in the flaming sun-light; a bird with rainbow-wings, which is at home in the high-noon of heaven's summertide. God give us to know more and more of this perfect peace, by enabling us to plunge more and more completely into his own self! One with God in Christ Jesus, we have reached everlasting peace.

Further let me speak upon this peace that God gives to us. It consists in *rest of the soul.* You know how the body casts all the limbs upon the bed, and they lie at ease; so does our spiritual nature stretch itself at ease. The heart reclines upon God's love, and the judgment leans on his wisdom; the desires recline, the hopes repose, the expectations rest, the soul throws all its weight and all its weariness upon the Lord, and then a perfect peace follows. To this absolute recumbency add a *perfect resignation to the divine will.* If you quarrel with God, your peace is at an end; but when you say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good," you have obtained one of the main elements of perfect peace. When the Lord's will is owned and loved, all ground for quarrel is over: the peace must be deep. It consists also in *sweet confidence in God,* when there is not the shadow of doubt about anything God does, for you are sure of this, if of nothing else, that he must be true, that he must be right and kind, and in all things better to you than you are to yourself. Then to leave everything with God, trusting in him for ever, because in him there is everlasting strength—this is peace. It means, in fact, the swallowing up of self in the great sea of God, the giving up of all we are, and all we have, so entirely to God that henceforth we cannot be troubled, or be disturbed, because that which could make trouble is already bound over to keep the peace. Then comes *a blessed contentment;* we want no more, we have enough. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him." Having him, my desires all stay at home with him. Let me but know him better, and I shall grow even more satisfied with unutterable beauties, his indiscribable perfections.

I hope you know this peace; and if you do, I need not tell you it means *freedom from everything like despondency.* The mind cannot yield to mistrust, for the Lord's peace keeps it. The compass on board an iron steam-vessel is placed aloft, so that it may not be so much influenced by the metal of the ship: though surrounded by that which would put it out of place, the needle faithfully adheres to the pole because it is set above the misleading influence. So with the child of God, when the Lord has given him peace: he is lifted beyond the supremacy of his sorrowful surroundings, and his heart is delivered from its sad surroundings.

Thus we are *kept from everything like rashness:* resting in God, we are not in sinful haste; we can wait God's time to deliver us, knowing that there is love in every second of the delay. We do not kick, as the untutored bullock kicks against the goad, but we push on the more eagerly with our furrow, toiling on to the end, till God shall appear for us. Thus we are saved from the temptations which come with our trials. We get the smelting of the furance without its smut. We endure the sorrow, but escape the sin, and this is joy enough for a pilgrim in this vale of tears.

O friends, he that hath this perfect peace is the richest man in the world! What are broad acres if you have a troubled spirit? What are millions of gold, laid by in the bank, if you have no God to go to in the hour of distress? What would it be to be a prince, a king, an emperor, if still you had no hope for the hereafter, no treasure of eternal love? I, therefore, charge you to get and keep this "peace,"—this perfect peace.

II. May the Lord strengthen me, in this time of painful weakness, while I speak upon another question. WHO ALONE CAN GIVE US THIS PEACE, AND PRESERVE IT IN US? The answer is in the words of the song, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace." See, it is God himself that can give us this peace, and keep us in it. The answer is one and indivisible. I know that while I was speaking some of you were saying, "The pastor is setting forth a high style of living; how can we reach to it?" But if peace be God's gift, and if the Lord himself is to keep us in it, how easily can we attain it by putting ourselves into his hands! To be striving after peace is hard work, for by our very anxiety to find it we miss its trail. How differently does the matter appear when we read, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace!"

How does the Lord keep his people in peace? I answer, first, *by a special operation upon the mind in the time of its trial.* We read in the 12th verse, "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us: for thou also hast wrought all our works in us." If this be so, we can understand how the Lord can work peace in us among all the other works. There is an operation of God upon the human mind, mysterious and inscrutable, of which the effects are manifest enough; and among those effects is this, a quiet of heart, a calm of spirit, which never comes in any other way. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace." The Creator of our mind knows how to operate upon it by his Holy Spirit. Let the heart and will be allowed to be as free as you choose, yet is the Lord free to act upon them. As we can tune the strings of a harp, so can the Lord adjust the chords of our heart to joyous serenity. Not only by the Word of God, and by our meditation thereon, but by his own direct operation, the Lord can create peace within the land-locked sea of the human spirit. The Lord can get at men, and influence them for the highest ends, apart from outward means. I have noticed that, altogether apart from the subjects of my reflections, I have, on a sudden, received a singular calm and peace of spirit directly from God. I can remember occasions when I had been hurried through broken water; the winds were wild, and my little vessel was at one instant lifted out of the water, and at the next beaten under the waves. Then, in a moment, everything was calm as a summer's evening, quiet as

when the hush of Sabbath falls on a hamlet in the lone Highlands. My heart was royally glad, for it had entered into perfect peace. I think you must have noticed such matters in your own case. Generally, I grant you, we are led into this peace by the consideration of the promises of God; but sometimes, apart from that, without our knowing why or wherefore, we have upon a sudden glided from darkness into light, by the distinct operation of the Spirit of God upon the mind.

But usually the Lord keeps his people in perfect peace *by the operation of certain considerations, intended by his infinite wisdom to work in that manner.* For instance, if sin be before the mind, it may well disquiet us, but when a man considereth that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, he hath that before him which allayeth the disquietude. When he considereth that, in dying, the Lord Jesus rendered unto God a full and satisfactory atonement for all the sin of all his believing people, then the man is at once, by that consideration, brought into perfect peace. Or suppose that a temporal trial ruffles the mind; the uneasy one turns to Scripture, and he finds that affliction is not sent as a legal punishment, but only as a fatherly chastisement of love: then is the bitterness of it passed away. Let a man know that all his trials work together for his good, and every sufficient reason for discontent is removed. The man noteth that there is good in the evil which surrounds him; indeed, he perceives the Lord to be at work everywhere, and henceforth he accepts the arrangements of providence without mistrust, and his heart is at peace. Depend upon it, dear friend, if you are tossed up and down, like the locust, you will only find peace by flying to the fields of Scripture. In this garden of the Lord, flowers are blooming which yield a balm for every wound of the heart. Never was there a lock of soul-trouble yet, but what there was a key to open it in the Word of God. For our pain, here is an anodyne; for our darkness, a lamp; for our loneliness, a friend. It is like the garden of Eden: a double river of peace glideth through it. Turn you then to the Lord's Word, to communion with his people, to prayer, to praise, or some form of holy service, and God will thus keep you in perfect peace.

I believe, also, that the Lord keeps his people in perfect peace *by the distinct operations of his providence.* When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. By secret workings he can quiet foes so that they are as still as a stone till thy people pass over, O Lord. When one providence apparently fights against you, another will come in to deliver you. The Lord's thoughts towards his people are thoughts of good, and not of evil; and they shall see it to be so. Either the afflicted shall reach a place of rest, or else double strength shall be given for the double trial. God will allow no war in his providence against his own child, all must be for you there. If you are God's Jonah, and are thrown into the sea, a whale must wait upon you; and if you are God's servant, and are brought into the lowest dungeon in Egypt, Pharaoh's own self must send and fetch you out of it to sit upon a throne. Lift up now your eyes, O you that crouch among the ashes because of your daily fret! Be no longer grovellers in the dust! The Lord is your King; nothing can break your peace. The Creator of yon stars and clouds, Lord of the universe, Monarch of all nature: thinkest thou that he cannot speedily

send thee deliverance? All these ages has he loved thee; canst thou mistrust him? Knowest thou not that he feeds the sparrows, ay, and the fish of the sea, and the myriads of living creatures which only his eye can see? There is no limit to his stores, nor bounds to his power. Canst thou not trust in him, that he will help thee through, and give thee rest? Thus, you see, our peace comes from God in some way or other; and I therefore the more earnestly ask you never to seek peace elsewhere. Do not seek peace by praying for the absence of trial. You may be just as happy *in* affliction as out of it, if the Lord be with you. Do not seek peace by cultivating hardness of heart, and indifference of spirit. No, when you are afflicted, you ought to feel it: God means you should; and you must learn to feel it, and yet be fully at peace. Do not imagine you can get peace by philosophy, or by considerations derived from reason, or by knowledge fetched from experience. There is but one well from which you can draw the sweet waters of perfect peace, and it bears about its rim this dainty inscription—"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, O Jehovah." Such peace as God giveth makes us like to God, it fills us with his love, it sets us acting according to his holiness; and, meanwhile, it prepares us for his palace, where everlasting peace perfumes every chamber, and covers the whole fabric with glory.

III. I have to answer another question this morning, and that is — WHO SHALL OBTAIN THIS PEACE? "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." The Hebrew is very involved and difficult to understand, but we shall not err if we permit it to teach us this,—that *the whole of our being is stayed upon God in order to this peace.* The word for "mind" is very vague, but it must include our thoughts. If your thoughts are stayed on God, you will have perfect peace: our misery comes from stray, vagabond, unsettled thoughts. If you will think of nothing except in connection with God, if you will only think of your sin in connection with a merciful God, if you will only think of tribulation in connection with a faithful God, if you will set the Lord always before you, so that he is at your right hand, you shall not be moved; but you certainly cannot be perfectly at peace till each thought, being held captive, learns to stay itself on him. This includes the imagination. The imaginations are most untamable wild beasts, and cause a world of terror in timid minds. Oh for grace to fasten up imagination in the Lord's own cage! We must not imagine anything to be possible which would make the Lord appear to be unkind or untrue. Pray that your imagination may be stayed on God, that you may never again imagine anything contrary to the grace, goodness, and love of your heavenly Father. What peace would rule if this were the case! I think our text includes especially the desires. Desires are very grasping things. It is utterly impossible to satisfy a worldly man's heart: if he had all he now wishes for, he would be sure then to enlarge his desires as hell, and ask for more. But you, dear friend, must stay your desires at some bound or other, and what more fit than to stay them upon God? Say, "I want nothing but what God wills to give me; I desire to have nothing but what he thinks is for his glory, and for my profit." When you once come to this point, when your imaginations and desires all pitch their tents within the

compass of God himself, who is your heavenly portion, then you will be kept in perfect peace.

What else is meant by being stayed? Does it not mean rested? When your thoughts recline at their ease in God's revealed will, that is staying upon God. When your desires are filled, and no longer open their greedy mouths for more, because God has filled them, that is staying. Does it not mean stopping there? We speak of staying at a place. Well, when our minds are stayed on God, we just stop at God; we do not propose any further journeying; we do not wish to push on in advance of where he leads the way. Our heart is rooted and grounded in the great Father's love, and so we stay our souls on him.

Staying means upholding. We speak of a stay, and of a mainstay; it is something upon which we are depending. Such a person is the stay of the house,—its chief upholder and support. See, then, what it is to stay your souls on God, and mind that you daily carry it out. Some are staying themselves upon a friend, others are staying themselves upon their own ability, but blessed is the man who stays himself on God. We are to have no confidence except in the Almighty arm; our reliance must be placed there only. When in our God we live, and move, and have our being, this is the crowning condition of a creature. Oh, to feel to the utmost that we are wholly the Lord's, and that, whether his will appoints us joy or woe, we shall be equally satisfied, for we have come to lie down on his will, and go no further. I like staid persons—you know what they are and where they are. They are not easily put about, neither do they readily forsake a cause which they have espoused. He that is stayed upon God is the most staid person in the world; he is steadfast, grounded, settled, and he cannot be removed from the blessed hope of the gospel. He that is fully staid is the man that shall have perfect peace. Oh, whither away, ye undecided ones? Oh, whither away, poor hearts? Will ye wander over every mountain? Will ye never take up a lodging with your God, and dwell at ease in him? Of this be ye well assured, your souls are on the wing, and are bound to fly on and on for ever unless they make bold to settle down upon the Lord their God. In God is rest, but in none else. All earth and heaven, time and eternity, cannot make up a peace for a bruised spirit, and yet a word from the Lord bestows it beyond recall.

Observe, it says, "stayed *on thee*." Dwell with emphasis upon that, for there are many ways of staying yourself, but you must mind that all your staying is on God; on your heavenly Father, who will withhold no good thing from you; on your divine Saviour, who pleads for you at the right hand of God; on the Holy Ghost, who dwells in you; on the triune God, who hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Now, instead of saying more, I should like, if God the Holy Spirit would help us, for each one to go through the mental act of rolling our care upon the Lord. Let us commit ourselves, and all that we are, and all that we have, and all that we have to do, and all that we have to suffer, to the guardian care of our loving God, casting all our care upon him, for he careth for us. Here we are in God, and here we mean to abide. We are not regretting the grace of yesterday, nor sighing for the grace of to-morrow. We stay where we are—at home with God.

Our anchor is down, and we do not mean to draw it up again. "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise." "Oh," saith one, "you do not know my troubles!" No, but I remember the story of a poor Methodist at the battle of Fontenoy. He had both his legs shot away, and when the surgeon came to attend to him, he was evidently bleeding to death, but he cried, "I am as happy as I can be out of Paradise!" Well, if in the very article of death, and suffering as he was, he could overflow with happiness, surely you and I can rejoice in perfect peace. I want you all to be like Dr. Watts, who said that for many years he went to his bed without the slightest solicitude as to whether he should wake up in this world, or in the next. To rest in God's Word, to rejoice in God's covenant, to trust in the divine sacrifice, to be conformed to God's will, to delight in God's self—this is to stay yourself upon God, and the consequence of it is perfect peace.

IV. WHY IS IT THAT THE LORD WILL KEEP THAT MAN IN PERFECT PEACE WHO STAYS HIMSELF ON HIM? The answer is, "Because he trusteth in thee." Dear friends, that means surely this, that *in faith there is a tendency to create and nourish peace.* In all other ways of trying to live before God there is a tendency to produce uneasiness; but he that believes shall rest. Faith lays a cool hand upon a burning brow, and removes the fever of the fearful heart. Faith hath a voice of silver, wherewith she whispers, "Peace, be still." Nothing can conduce so much to a quiet life as a firm, unwavering confidence in the faithfulness of God's promise, and in the fact that what he has promised he is able also to perform.

Further, the text means this, that when a man stays himself upon God it is not only his faith that brings him peace, but *his faith is rewarded by peace,* which the Lord gives him as a token of approval. A kind of discipline is going on in our heavenly Father's family, not rewards and punishments such as judges award to criminals, but such as fathers give to their children. By this we are being trained for the many mansions in the Father's house above. If we will stay ourselves on God, we shall have peace; if we will not do so, we shall have no rest, but shall be in sore disquietude. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." The pressure of the trouble comes with the decline of faith. If thou believest more, it may not make thee richer, but thou wilt not feel thy poverty so keenly. If thou believest more, it may not make thee healthy in body, but thou shalt not fret because of thy sickness: if thou believest more, it will not give thee back thy buried ones, but it shall fill thy heart with a still higher love. "All things are possible to him that believeth," and peace, peace is among those possibilities; but if thou wilt not believe, neither shalt thou be established, thine unbelief shall be a rod for thine own back, a bitter for thine own cup. If thou wilt not trust thy God, thou shalt wander into a weary land, seeking rest and finding none. Come, brothers and sisters, let us fly from such a fate, and win perfect peace as the reward of perfect confidence.

I think, lastly, this peace comes out of faith, because *it is faith's way of proclaiming herself.* If God gives you perfect peace, you will not need, when you go home, to shout to your friends, "I am a believer." They will soon see it. You have lost one that was very

dear to you, and instead of fretting and repining, you kiss the hand of God, and go about your daily duties with patience. That is a very wonderful fruit of the Spirit, wrought by faith, and thus faith is seen. A man has had a fire, or some other form of loss, and his comforts are destroyed. If he is an unbeliever, we do not wonder that he tears his hair, and curses God, and rages and fumes. But if he has stayed himself on God, he will be at peace, and he will say, "The Lord hath done it. It is the Lord: let him do what seemeth him good." By this will you be known to be the disciples of Christ, when in patience ye possess your souls. Faith which only operates when all goes well, is the mockery of faith; the love that praises God when God gives thee according to thy desire is no more than the love of some dogs to their masters, who care just as much for them as the number of the scraps may be. Wilt thou have such a cupboard love as that? It were far better to get to this state, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." If thou hast this faith within thee, then shall thy peace be like a river. The peace of God which passeth all understanding shall keep thy heart and mind by Christ Jesus.

I am very much concerned in leaving you, that you, dear friends, should aim much at the possession of this peace. It is a mode of propagating the gospel never to be despised. Multitudes of people have been converted by seeing the holy patience of God's people: they have been impressed by it, and have said, "There must be something in a religion that can give such a peace as this." When you are fretting and worrying, you are undoing your minister's work. When the people of God are over and above troubled, when they count life to be a burden to them because things are not as they would wish them to be, they are really slandering their heavenly Father, and they are preventing the wandering from coming back. The unconverted say, "Why should we go to God to be made miserable?" O ye banished seed, be glad! O ye troubled ones, rejoice! Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, yet lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. Within a short time you shall put on the garments of your excellency and beauty, and the weeds of your mourning shall be laid aside. Wherefore play the man: better still, play the Christian; and let all men know that where God is, and where the Lord rules the heart, there is, there must be, a deep and profound peace. May God bless you, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah xxvi.

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A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 1ST, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON DECEMBER 18TH, 1884.

"My God will hear me."—Micah vii. 7.

WHAT a charming sentence! Can you say it? Only five words, but what meaning! Huge volumes of poetry have appeared from Chaucer even to Tennyson; but it seems to me that the essence of poetry lies hid in a marvellously condensed form within these few words. It shall take you many an hour to suck out all their sweetness. There is an almost inconceivable depth of meaning in them: and of richness of assured experience and of sweet conclusions of a hallowed faith they are full to the brim.

"My God will hear me." There is more eloquence in that sentence than in all the orations of Demosthenes. He that can speak thus can say more than if he were able to declare truthfully that all worlds were his own; for he grasps God himself, and holds the present and the future in the hollow of his hand.

"My God will hear me." It is prophetic; but the prophet has taken upon himself no unusual power, neither does he intend his prophecy to be true of himself alone. He puts this divine sentence into the mouth of every believer; every child of God may dare to say that his God will hear him, for he may dare to say the truth. I feel as if I could not preach from the text, and did not want to do so. It needs no aid of wit or words; for myself I would be well content to exhibit this diamond with many facets by merely holding it up and letting the light fall on it, and flash back from it in variety of brilliance.

"My God will hear me." It is a choice song for a lone harp, which is half afraid of the choir of musicians, and loves to have its strings touched in solitude. I feel as I repeat it that I want to sit down and quietly enjoy it. As I see the cows lie in the meadow quietly chewing the cud, so would I ruminate on these few but precious words. Let

me hear the sounds again and again, till my tongue, learning their rhythmic melody, repeats as matter of habitual delight the assurance, "My God will hear me."

A charming sentence, as I have said; but in what a queer place we find it! Just as they find gold in the dark mine, and as we see stars in the black night, so do we find these rich words in the midst of floods of grief and woe. The man of God is pricked and torn by the briars of the age in which he travels; he is vexed and wearied with the bribery and corruption all around him; he cannot find peace either at home or abroad,—nay, not even in the bosom of her whom he loves; he is everywhere disquieted and driven to and fro; and yet it is just at that time that he cries, "My God will hear me." From this I gather—and I gather it not from this alone, but from my own personal experience—that it is generally when things are at the worst that we know most about the best. When we are disappointed of men, then become we most contented with our God. When earth-born springs are dry, then the eternal fountain-heads flow more freely than ever, and as we drink of them our soul is more satisfied than ever it had been before. God is dearest when goods are fewest. Heaven is warmest when earth is coldest. It is a great blessing for you, dear friend, that you can say "My God will hear me." I do not mind much about your surroundings; they may be grievous and trying; but if they have helped to bring you to this pass, that you have a solid confidence that God will hear you, I congratulate you upon the priceless consequences, even though I may condole with you for the sufferings that have brought them to you. We do not weep over the mud which bespatters the gold-digger when he finds his nugget, neither will we fret over the affliction which makes God to be more precious to our friend.

Again, come back to the short and sweet sentence of the text, and may it be inexpressibly delightful to our hearts while we meditate upon it for a while. "My God will hear me."

I. The first thing I shall note at this time is THE TITLE. This is the bottom of the whole text really, the true foundation of the confidence which is expressed in it. The title is "*my God*": it is not God alone, but God in covenant with me, to whom I look for help. I shall be heard by "my God."

I am afraid that some of you will have to draw back a little from the text at the very commencement. As I remarked the other day, to say there is a God is not much. It is the same as to say, there is a bank; but there may be a bank, and you may be miserably poor. There certainly is a God, but that God may be no source of comfort to you. The joy of the whole thing lies in that word "my." "*My* God will hear me."

Begin then with the enquiry, put to your own soul,—Can I truly think of God, and call him "my God"? If so, that means *election and selection.* There were many gods in the day of the prophet Micah; at least, men spoke as if there were. Men talked of this god, and of that, and each nation had its own peculiar deity, and each man walked in the name of his god, and gloried in it. But the prophet in effect says of Jehovah, the one living and true God, the God that made heaven and earth: "This God is my God. Others may worship gods of wood, or of stone, or of silver, or of gold; but as for me, my heart shall only

worship the great Invisible, whom none hath seen, to whom none can approach. The eternal Creator alone will I adore."

Now every man at this present time has a god. Alas, how many make their belly their god! The golden calf is never without its crowds of devoted worshippers. Gods to-day are as numerous in England as in any heathen country: let me then ask,—have you taken the God who is your Maker, your Preserver, your Redeemer to be the great object of your life? That is your god which rules your nature—that which is your motive power—that for which you live. Do you live for Jehovah as your God, or are you only living for yourself or for some temporary end and purpose? Will the object of your life die with your dying, and be buried in your grave? Or can you say unto the living God, "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee. Thou art my God for ever and ever: thou shalt be my guide even unto death!" If so, it supposes your election of this God beyond every other; and I put it to you—is this election made? and made once for all? Can you cry with Joshua, "As for me and my house we will serve Jehovah"? Is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ your God for all time? Be it so; you shall never regret the choice.

"My God,"—that supposes *an appropriation by faith.* Have you taken Jehovah to be your God? Have you made bold to take him for your very own? In the covenant of grace God gives over to his people himself, and all that he is, and all that he has, by a covenant of salt. As the believer becomes God's portion, so the Lord becomes the believer's portion. He declares himself to be ours and puts himself at our disposal, exercising a boundless condescension of love in so doing. Our part in it is, that we do accept this covenant gift, and by an act of faith say, "This which God gives me, I, unworthy though I be, do freely accept. Though I deserve it not, yet as he has given himself to me, I, with gladness, receive him, to be my God, my portion, world without end." Well do I remember the joyous day when first my heart took this possession to herself. It had appeared to be like a land of fire and terror, and I desired it not; but when the Spirit of God had instructed and renewed me, then I perceived that God was as the land of Goshen—ay, as the land of Canaan, that floweth with milk and honey; ay, as the land Beulah, where the sun goes no more down for ever, where all is joy, and peace, and love; yea, as heaven itself, for God is the very soul, and centre, and source, and fulness of bliss. My heart annexed this blessed territory with trembling joy; yea, she seemed to have no other possession left except her God. From that hour she grew rich and remained so. What is there more for me but my God? How can I go an inch beyond "my God, my heaven, my all"? Now, beloved hearer, have you thus appropriated the Eternal God to be your own? Can you say to-day, "First and foremost among my possessions is my God. I will not say that I have this and that, and ever so many other things, but I will sing, 'My God, thou art mine!' Perhaps I could not say that I have much of this world's goods, but I have the highest Good. If I have not all, yet I have the All-in-All, who is more than all, and he is everything to my spirit"? I trust you can say "my God," first, by your choice of him; and, secondly, by your appropriation of him through faith. Wherever this is the case it is

the work of the Spirit of God, and he must have our reverent love for thus enriching us.

"My God,"—this signifies *knowledge and acquaintance.* Does it not? For unless the words are meaningless, you know who it is that you are talking of, and you have had some acquaintance with him, and dealings with him. If I say, "So-and-so is my friend," I give you to understand that I know him; and if I say, "Jehovah is my God," I profess that I know him and have fellowship with him. You remember the inscription which Paul discovered upon an altar at Athens, "To the unknown God." I would not have you worship there, my brother; but I would have you understand that word of the apostle, "After that ye had known God, or rather were known of God." There is an intimate knowledge subsisting between God and his people. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and all his people know him, so that among them no one has need to say to his brother, Know the Lord, for they all know him, from the least even to the greatest.

Now, what knowest thou of God? Hast thou ever spoken with him? Has he spoken to thee? Hast thou told him thy secrets? Has he revealed himself to thee, as it is written, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant"? Now, I am not talking about fancies. If any of you deem this to be fanciful, it is because you are strangers to the covenant of promise; but I am speaking now to a people who know more than I can tell them of what this means. As for myself, I know something of nature, and of the works of God's hands, but my soul cares little for that knowledge compared with knowing HIM. Willingly and gladly I would forget all else I know if I might but know more of *him;* for well am I persuaded that when old age comes on, and memory fails me, that which my soul shall hold as with a death grip, will not be historical remembrance, classical lore, or theological learning, but what she knows by inward experience of the Lord her God. When the veil shall drop upon all mortal shadows, to be uplifted upon eternal realities, then my heart shall care nothing for what she knew of things terrestrial; but she shall value beyond conception what she shall then know of the Immortal, the Invisible, the only wise God, her Saviour. I am sure that I am speaking to many of you who can use the expression, "My God," and mean by it that the God in whom you live and move and have your being is your friend, and your Father; that he dwells in you by the Holy Ghost, and that in him you dwell as you hide yourselves in the wounds of Christ. Oh happy men and women that can with knowledge and affection say, "My God." Unhappy you who have neither part nor lot in this matter. Your sorrows shall be multiplied which hasten after another god, for your vanities will fail you: but as for you that know the Lord, to you shall joy increase even as the growing light of the rising sun.

If you have come as far as this, I am sure that you can follow me farther by admitting that the title, "My God," implies *an embrace of love.* You know God as you know your child; but as you look at your boy, you cry, "My child, my child," and you mean a great deal by that, because your child is much more yours on account of the affection that you feel for him than any other possession that you have upon

the face of the earth. You would lose everything else sooner than lose the darling of your bosom. The expression, "My God" has an inexpressible amount of sweet affection wrapped up in it. I delight in that line of our old Psalm

"Yea, mine own God is he."

He is my very own. My God belongs to me as much as if he belonged to no other. My heart has twisted her tendrils round about him as fast and firm as if no other tiny plant had dared to grasp the same upholder. The divine Father—oh, what joy lights up the soul when we think of that splendid fatherhood, that infinite relationship of the Divine One to us, whom he has "begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." How have we sometimes sung with David,

"Such pity as a father hath
Unto his children dear,
Like pity shows the Lord to such
As worship him in fear."

We love the Father, and call him "My God." And as for Jesus, the second person in the Divine Unity, Incarnate God, does not your very heart leap at the sound of his name? Is there not all music condensed into two syllables in that name "Jesus"? I know that it is so to you. He is your very own Christ, your Saviour, for ever and ever. And the blessed Spirit—do we not with equal affection lay hold upon him, the Paraclete, the Comforter, the Quickener, the Illuminator, the best of friends, bearing with our ill behaviour and still abiding in us, making us meet for the eternal kingdom? Yes, beloved, we do love our God. Do not our hearts say in our prayers, "O Lord, do not believe our actions, for, disobedient as we are, we do love thee. Do not believe our forgetfulness, do not believe the lukewarmness which occasionally creeps over us; for thou knowest all things, thou knowest that we love thee"? Such affection makes us cry, "My God." We cannot comprehend him, but we apprehend him with the grip of hallowed love. We feel that we can never give him up, even as he will never give us up. I am not what I ought to be, but I cannot give up my God. Hard as my heart feels, yet it melts with love to him who has loved me from before the foundations of the world. Who shall separate me from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, my Lord?

What a deal there is in the title! But we have not exhausted it by a long way; let us have another drink from the well. You feel that now *the obedience of your life is rendered to him most cheerfully*, for this is a sure outcome of the heart's crying, "He is my God." A man cannot call God his God in truth unless he desires to obey him; for God is a name to adore, to reverence, to worship. He who speaks of God but never obeys him is a practical atheist; he has no God. That man who talks about God in the synagogue, but who has no regard for him in the market, makes Jehovah to be no better a deity than the idols of the heathen, who are only gods in their own temples, even if there. The man upon whose heart and hand the Godhead has no kind of influence—such a man is a liar and knows not God, but renders to him lip service, which is to God's dishonour, and not to his glory. Yes, beloved, if you are what you profess to be, you can declare, "With all my infirmities

and imperfections, I desire that my whole life should be obedient to the divine precept. I wish in all things to do that which is right and good, and true and kind, according to the mind of Christ, in which I see the mind of God my Father." Concerning these things let there be great searchings of heart. Come and look in this glass and see if you bear the features of "imitators of God as dear children"; for it will go hard with you if you turn out to be pretenders.

Let me only add that this expressive phrase "My God" hints at *a joy and delight in him.* As men would say—"my love," "my choice," "my treasure," "my delight," so doth the prophet say "My God." The very name wakes all the music of his soul. As when the sleeping flowers, being touched by the first beams of the rising sun, open their bright eyes to look on him who is the foster-father of all their beauty, and seem each one to say "My King," so do our hearts rejoice in the presence of the Lord, and our quickened spirits cry "My God."

So much for the title. May it be written on your hearts by the Holy Ghost.

II. The second point in our brief text is THE ARGUMENT, for I believe the title contains within itself a secret logical force. "My God *will hear me.*" As surely as he is my God he will hear me. Why?

Well, he will hear me first *because he is God,* because he is the living and true God. Those gods of stone cannot hear me, but my God will hear me. The gods that many men choose will not hear them in the day of trouble. To which of them will they call in the hour of their affliction? But my God will hear me. It is his memorial that he hears prayer. The oracles of the heathen were but liars. Those who sought unto the false gods did but dote upon falsehoods; they were deceivers and deceived. But my God will hear me. As surely as he is God he will answer prayer. If he does not answer prayer, then he is no more a God than Jupiter, or Saturn, or Venus. For us as Christian people and worshippers of the Most High, it is a truth never to be questioned, that Jehovah is the living and true God, whose memorial is that he heareth the prayers of his people. "My God will hear me."

You see in what a tone of confidence this prophet speaks, and why should not every child of God speak with the same confidence? The joy of religion lies in a hearty faith in it. You begin handling it with dainty fingers, criticising it everlastingly, questioning this and questioning that with anxious debate of heart; and the consequence is that you miss its sweetness. It is nothing to your comfort till it is everything to your faith. You must believe it, and the more thoroughly you believe it the more will it prove itself true to you. The proof the gospel lies in the testing of it, by which I mean in the practical proving and enjoying of it. Suppose you try to pray, and do not believe in prayer: well, you do not pray. You get nothing by such praying: you work a dry pump. You must have confidence in the mercy seat, if the mercy seat is to be a place of refuge for you. "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." To my mind it seems the right thing to believe in the living God right up to the hilt—to believe in his promise without stint or limit. His word is either true or false.

If it is false, I will never preach it: if it is true, I will never doubt it. There let it stand like a column of brass:—*though all things else should fail, God must hear prayer.* He *may* do this and he *may* do that, but he *must* hear prayer. My God will hear me because he is a true God, and no liar; and he has himself declared, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." He has laid it down as unquestionable fact, "He that seeketh findeth, he that asketh receiveth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." How can he run back from this? Why should I imagine that he will lie or repent?

But why am I so sure, as a matter of argument, that God will hear prayer? The answer is in the title again, "*My God.*" *Because he has made himself my God he will hear me.* O you that are familiar with your God, who can therefore call him by the dear title of "My God," you will see the overwhelming conclusiveness of this reasoning. To hear a petitioner is a small thing compared to giving yourself over to him. "My God will hear me," for doubtless, if he has given himself to be my God, he will hear me. He has done the greater thing, he will surely do the less. If, in infinite condescension, he permits me to call him "my God," and I perceive all through his gospel that he invites me to do so, then, surely he will hear me. He that hath said, "They shall be my people, and I will be their God," will do the much smaller thing: he will, without doubt, hear them when they call upon him. "Ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children. How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Is not that clear enough? He has given us himself, and his Son; how can he shut out our cries? After what he has done for us in the past, we cannot doubt that he will hear us. What, give us cleansing by his blood, and then not hear us? What, give us the new birth, and then not hear us? Did he bless us when we did not seek him, and will he not hear us when we do seek him? What, look after us when we were like stray sheep, deaf to all his calls; seek after us till he restored us; and then not hear us when we become the sheep of his pasture? Impossible! The argument is irresistible: My God will certainly hear me.

Moreover, *my God has heard me so many times;* therefore, be it far from me to doubt his present and future favour. A brother in prayer reminded us just now that we ought to have greater faith than the saints of the olden times, because we have many more centuries of the divine faithfulness to read of and to see. It is so; but I fear that observation seldom acts upon us so forcibly as actual personal experience. What shall I say to my beloved brothers and sisters here who are getting old? They have had such experience. God has heard your prayers many times, my aged brethren, and your faith is thereby confirmed. When we first began to pray, we were staggered if objectors questioned us. "You talk about God having heard your prayer." "Yes," we said, "he did hear us," and we stated our case. The sceptic sneered, and said "That was merely a coincidence." When we heard that remark for the first time, we were somewhat taken aback. We admitted that we could not draw an inference from two or three facts, for, perhaps,

in after years there might be thirty facts which would tell the other way. But, my veteran brethren, we are not in that condition to-night, for some of us have had thirty or forty years' experience of God's hearing prayer, and our facts are as many as the hairs of our heads. Do opponents say that these are coincidences? We do not care to answer such perverse janglings. If they were in our position, they would not wish to answer such remarks. They would laugh; and that is all that they would find in their hearts to do. A man puts on warm clothing and is not pinched by the frost; his acquaintance tells him that he does not believe in flannel and broad-cloth; he shivers in his unbelief, and tells the well-clad man that his comfort is a mere coincidence. Humorous, is it not? But if the objector gets frozen to death, the wit grows rather grim! When we have not prayed, and have not received a blessing, and have been ready to perish, I suppose our failure has been a coincidence! And when we have betaken ourselves to our knees, and have cried mightily to God, and pleaded the promises, and God has answered us as visibly as if he had rent the blue heavens, and thrust out his almighty arm to help us, that has been a coincidence! I call such things plain answers to prayer, but those who have never experienced the like think me a fanatic. I will therefore let them use their own terms. We will not wrangle over words,—"A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." As to the delivering mercy of God—you shall call it a coincidence if you like, but to us it will always be a blessed proof that the Lord hears prayer.

Using this sweet title, containing as it does within itself a whole century of logic, we say, joyfully, "My God will hear me." What bliss it is to have so sweet an assurance ever at hand! It is a versicle of heavenly music,—"My God will hear me." The Lord has entered into covenant with us that he will not turn away from us from doing us good, and *in that covenant his hearing prayer is included.* He could not be our friend and be deaf to our appeals: he could not be in fellowship with us and shut out our cries. Listen, however, to some of his own covenant words: "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me": Psalm l. 15. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him": Psalm xci. 15. "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them": Psalm cxlv. 18, 19. "And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear": Isaiah lxv. 24. "Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not": Jeremiah xxxiii. 3. Do you need more than this? The Lord hath said it, and he will make it good. He has never said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain.

Were not the Lord to hear prayer, and bear his people through their troubles, *he would himself be a great loser.* He would lose all that his wisdom has planned, all that his sovereignty has ordained, all that his love has begun, all that his power has wrought, and all that whereon his heart is set. Did not Jehovah hear prayer it were to him as though a father no more heard the voice of his child: he would lose that which

charms his fatherly mind, and miss that which is a solace to his loving heart. If God doth not hear me, he will lose me; and this I feel he will not do, for he hath graven me upon the palms of his hands, that I may never be forgotten of him. O, yes, my God will hear me; his truth and honour cannot be imperilled by a refusal to hear the pleadings of his own child.

III. Bear with me while I invite you, in the third place, to notice the FAVOUR ITSELF. "My God will *hear me.*" You notice that in Scripture we do not often find the expression, "My God will answer me." We do read that he answers prayer, but more frequently God is said to be the God that *heareth* prayer. It is better for us to have a promise that God will hear us than a promise that God will always answer us. In fact, if it were a matter of absolute fact that God would always answer the prayers of his people as they present them, it would be an awful truth. I should shrink from ever praying again if I were absolutely sure that the Lord would answer my prayer, whatever it might be. I might curse myself seven times deep by a prayer within the next seven minutes, if there were no safeguards and limits to the promise of prayer being answered. It is neither desirable nor possible that all things should be left to our choice: so much do I feel this, that if my Lord should say to me, "From this hour I will always answer your prayer just as you pray it," the first petition I would offer would be, "Lord, do nothing of the sort." Because that would be putting the responsibility of my life upon myself, instead of allowing it to remain upon God. It were, in fact, to make me the master of the house, and to make me my own shepherd: the very first thing I should wish would be to strip myself of such a power. I would cry, "Lord, do as thou wilt about answering me; I will be well content if thou wilt hear me." I like that kind of hearing prayer of which Ralph Erskine says:

> "I'm heard when answered, soon or late,
> Yea, heard when I no answer get:
> Most kindly answered when refused,
> And treated well when harshly used."

It is enough for a praying heart that it has a hearing God.

But notice, "My God will hear me." It means, first, literally that he will hear me *as a listener.* A good brother of my acquaintance, a minister of the gospel, going to preach from the text that God will hear prayer, called upon one of his poor people, who said when the visit was over that she had greatly enjoyed his call. He thought to himself, "I have scarcely said a word, and yet she says that I have done her good." Turning to her, he enquired, "Sister, how can I have done you good, for I have hardly spoken with you?" "Ah, sir," she replied, "you have listened so kindly; you have heard all I had to say, and there are very few who will do that." Just so. People in deep trouble like somebody to hear them all through: even little children are comforted by telling mother all about it. We are in such a hurry with poor troubled spirits that we hasten them on to the end of the sentence, and try to make them skip the dreary details. But to them this seems unkind, for their story is sacred; and, therefore, they go slowly on with it, till we are quite tired. I have often hurried on a poor despondent creature till

I have seen the uselessness of it: it is always best to let them spin on. It does them good. To tell out the heart to a patient listener is a great relief to a burdened spirit, and the heart must do it in its own way. Here is a sweet assurance, "My God will hear me." I may be very bad, and what I say may be very broken, and I may groan a good deal, and I may say the same thing over and over again, and my whole ditty may be very stupid; but, "My God will hear me." He is in no hurry: he is the God of patience. He will listen to my dreary talk, and endure each gloomy particular. I need not hold him as the Ancient Mariner held the wedding guest who was unwilling to hear his weary rhyme of the sea: my God will willingly listen to me right through, from beginning to end, groans and all. "My God will hear me."

And then the Lord will hearken as *a friend full of sympathy*. Some people listen but do not hear. You tell them your story, but it does not help you a bit, because their minds are no more moved by your case than if they were far away. They are just saying to themselves, "We will hear this poor old lady's story; it will please her." But it does not please her, because she perceives that they have no sympathy, no fellow-feeling. The kind of person you like to tell your story to is one who weeps with you—who is really afflicted with your affliction. It is greatly comforting to have a person with you who feels just as you feel, who, when you are very stupid, seems to be stupid too, who frets as you fret, and groans in your groaning. "Mother," said a little girl once, "I cannot make it out; Mrs. Smith says I do her so much good. Poor Mrs. Smith has lost her husband, mother, and she is very sad. She sits and cries, and I get up and lay my cheek on her cheek, and I cry and say that I love her, and then she says that she loves me, and that I comfort her." Just so. That is the truest form of consolation: is it not? "Weep with them that weep." That is how God, my God, will hear me, feeling with me, sympathising with me. "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them." "I am with thee, saith the Lord."

> "I feel at my heart all thy sighs and thy groans,
> For thou art most near me, my flesh and my bones.
> In all thy afflictions thy head feels the pain,
> They all are most needful, not one is in vain."

"My God will hear me"; he will listen to me, and he will sympathise with me.

"My God will hear me"; that is, he will turn it over and discriminate in his own mind, and he will not allow me to be condemned by the hurried judgment of men. He will hear me *as a judge patiently hears a case*. Others will come in and clamour against me, and refuse to listen to a word of explanation; but my God will hear me. That was a splendid utterance of the holy patriarch Job! He went a long way further than he knew he went when he said it,—"I know that my Redeemer liveth." His unkind friends charged him very terribly; and Job spoke up for himself, but he did not get on at it. He could not plead his own cause successfully, and therefore, in his desperation, he cried, "I have a God that will yet plead my cause, and if he does not do it while I am alive, yet I know that he liveth; and though after my

skin worms devour my body, yet in my flesh shall I behold him, and I shall be cleared from this misrepresentation; I shall be delivered from this suspicion. I know I shall. My God will hear me. He will hear my suit right through and do me justice, and I shall behold him whom my eyes shall see for myself and not another." Job felt assured of being cleared at last. Dear child of God, you may do the same. Your character shall not be injured by malicious tongues. They lie against you; they refuse you a hearing; they wrest your words; they empty the buckets of their contempt upon you; but your God will hear you.

Then, at the back of that, of course, comes the conclusion of every loving heart that, as God will hear the case right through, so he will certainly *hear as a Helper.* "My God will hear me."

Now, child of God, go away with this promise in your hand, and in your heart—"My God will hear me"; and then use it like a magic wand. Turn it whichever way you will and it will clear your path. You are going to preach the gospel in a distant country, perhaps; and your spirit sinks as you sigh, "Who is sufficient for these things?" Lift up your heart to God, and his grace shall be sufficient for you, and his strength shall be made perfect in your weakness, for your God will hear you. Or you have to go home to-night to a sick house, and to lose one that is dear to you. You shall be sustained, for in your ear is this word, "My God will hear me." Or, perhaps, you yourself have to sicken and die. Do you enquire—What shall I do in the swellings of Jordan? Here is your happy answer, "My God will hear me." I shall cry to him, and he will answer me. He will have a desire to the work of his hands. Yea, though I go down into the valley of the shadow of death my God will hear me; and when I lie in the tomb my God will remember me, and he will call me up with sound of trumpet, and my body shall live again. My God shall hear me singing his praises before his throne. My God shall hear me, world without end, as my whole being shall lift up her joy-notes of "Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah" unto him who loved me out of the pit, and lifted me up to his own right hand.

IV. My only sorrow about this text is my fear that it could not honestly fall from some of your lips: you could not truthfully say, "My God will hear me." So I close by noting THE PERSON to whom it belongs,—"My God will hear *me.*" Will he hear you? Dear heart, are you cast down under a sense of sin? Do you seek forgiveness? He will hear you. Are you burdened because you cannot live without sin? Would you be free from all evil? He will hear you. Are you persecuted for righteousness' sake? Are the men of your household turned to be your foes? He will hear you, and cause you to rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer for Jesus' sake. Are you assured of the result of prayer? You shall not be disappointed; your God will hear you. Have you long been praying? Cease not from importunity, but solace yourself with this sure belief—*My God will hear me.* Will you now come and cast yourselves into the arms of Jesus, the Crucified? Your God has heard you. Be of good cheer.

O, my dear hearer, have you a God? Strange question, but I press it even with tears,—have you a God? If you have no God, of course you have nobody to hear you when the great water-floods prevail. My

dear hearer, if you make the world your God it cannot hear you in the day of your trouble. You may be a very rich man, and have large estates, but I would sooner occupy the place of the poorest believing pauper in the workhouse than take your position without a God and without a throne of grace. How do people live that have no God to go to? If a man were to say to me, "I never get a morsel of bread to eat at all," I should wonder how he lived. But when a man says, "I never pray, and God never hears me," I am in equal wonder. How can the poor creature exist? These are hard times with a great many of you. You have not many worldly comforts; indeed, some of you cannot even find work. What can you do without a God to fly to? I suppose your head aches sometimes, like mine; I suppose cares and troubles eat into your mind as they do into mine; I suppose you have your difficulties, and your knots that you cannot untie, just as I have mine. How do you keep your souls alive without a God? I pray God that I may never live a day without prayer, and without trusting my God. However do you bear up, some of you? I do not wonder that you go and get drunk to drown your thoughts. I do not wonder that you want frivolities and theatricals, and all sorts of childish toys to put your cares out of your minds, for you need something or other to help you to forget the miseries which are coming upon you thick and heavy. Yet is it not madness to drive away wise thoughts? What a wretched business it must be to be in dread of your own thoughts! You dare not sit alone in your chamber for half-an-hour and think, because if you did you would begin to think of dying, and you could not bear to think of that without a God. You might even be driven to think of hell and of a judgment to come; and that you could not endure. If you dare not *think* of them, how will you bear them? Oh poor souls, poor souls, you are in a sad state, indeed! But you need not remain so. If any man wills to have God to be his own God, grace has given him that will. If you desire Christ, you may have him. What is the price? Nothing at all. Receive him freely. Believe in Jesus Christ; that is, trust yourself with him; and God is your God; and you may go on your way full of joy and thankfulness. God bless you and comfort you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Micah vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—622, 999, 981.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FALLEN ANGELS A LESSON TO FALLEN MEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."—2 Peter ii. 4.

"THESE are ancient things." Most men hunger after the latest news; let us on this occasion go back upon the earliest records, and think of the hoar past, before man was made. It does us good to look back upon the past of God's dealings with his creatures; herein lies the value of history. We should not confine our attention to God's dealings with men, but we should observe how he acts towards another order of beings—how he dealt with angels before man had become the second sinner. If angels transgress, what is his conduct towards them? This study will enlarge our minds, and show us great principles in their wider sweep. We shall inevitably make mistakes in our judgment as to God's conduct towards men if we do not remember sufficiently how he has dealt with beings who are in certain respects much superior to the human race. By seeing how God treated the rebellious angels, light may be cast upon his dealings with us, and thereby misapprehensions may be removed.

We shall go to our subject at once, asking aid from the Spirit of all grace. We will first view the mysterious fact of the fall of the angels, and their casting away, *for our warning.* Then, secondly, we shall regard the fact of the hopeless doom of the angels that sinned as it stands in contrast to the amazing mercy of the Lord towards men. Thus our second head will lead us to view the text *for our admiration:* I hope for the increase of our grateful love and reverent wonder.

I. First, then, let us consider our text FOR OUR WARNING. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell." Behold here a wonder of wickedness, angels sin; a wonder of justice, God spared them not; a wonder of punishment, he cast them down to hell; a wonder of future vengeance, for they are reserved unto judgment! Here are deep themes, and terrible. Black as tempest are the facts, and flashes of terrible lightning flame forth therefrom.

Let us receive a warning, first, against *the deceivableness of sin,* for whoever we may be, *we may never reckon that, on account of our position or condition, we shall be free from the assaults of sin,* or even certain

of not being overcome by it. Notice that these who sinned were angels in heaven, so that there is no necessary security in the most holy position. We know that they were in heavenly places, for it was from that high abode that they were cast down to hell, by the terrible right hand of the Eternal King. These angels, that kept not their first estate, but sinned against God, dwelt with their brethren in the courts of the Most High; they seemed to be, as it were, walled round with fire to keep out all evil from them. Their communications were only with perfect spirits like themselves; but yet, as they were undergoing a probation, they were made capable of choosing evil if they willed so to do, or of cleaving to good if their hearts were steadfast with their God. There were none about them to tempt them to evil; they were, on the contrary, surrounded with every good and holy influence: they saw God, and abode in his courts, they conversed with seraphim and cherubim. Their daily engagements were all of a holy order; worship and service were their duty and delight. Their company was select; there were no lapsed classes among them to render the moral atmosphere impure. They were not only in a paradise, but in the central abode of God himself. Yet evil entered into the breasts of angels—even envy, ambition, pride, rebellion; and they fell, fell never to rise again,

> "High in the bright and happy throng,
> Satan, a tall archangel sat;
> Amongst the morning stars he sung,
> Till sin destroy'd his heavenly state.
>
> "'Twas sin that hurled him from his throne.
> Grovelling in fire the rebel lies:
> 'How art thou sunk in darkness down,
> Son of the morning, from the skies!'"

Beloved hearer, this should teach us not to presume upon anything connected with our position here below. You may be the child of godly parents who watch over you with sedulous care, and yet you may grow up to be a man of Belial. You may never enter a haunt of iniquity, your journeys may be only to and from the house of God, and yet you may be a bond-slave of iniquity. The house in which you live may be none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven through your father's prayers, and yet you may yourself live to blaspheme. Your reading may be bound up with the Bible; your companions may be of the choicest; your talk may concern holy things; you may be as if you were in the garden of the Lord, shut in to everything that is good, and every evil shut out from you; and yet you may have no part nor lot with the people of God. As there were a Ham and an ungodly Canaan even in Noah's Ark, so may it turn out that you may be such in the very midst of all that should make you gracious and sanctified. It is unhappy indeed to read the annals of human life, and to meet with men that have gone from their mother's side—have gone from where their father knelt in prayer—have gone out from brothers and sisters whose piety was not only unquestionable, but even remarkable,—and they have gone to be leaders in every form of wickedness. Many of the enemies of the cross of Christ have been so trained in godliness that we find it hard to believe that they

can indeed be so vile ; an apostle must declare it with tears ere he is believed. The sons of God they seemed to be, but they turned out to be sons of perdition after all. Let no man, therefore, arise and shake himself, as though no sins could ever bind him, because he feels himself to be a very Samson through his connections and surroundings. Yes, sir, it may be that you shall fall—fall foully, fall desperately, unless the grace of God be in you—fall so as never to come to God, and Christ, and find eternal life. It was so with these angels. The best natural thing that creation can work is not sufficient to preserve the fickle creature from sin : regeneration must come in—the work of the Holy Ghost, a yet higher work than the material creating power of God, or else you may put the creature where you please, and that creature may be perfect, and yet sin will reach and destroy him. You and I are far from perfect. We are not angels unfallen : we are not angels at all ; but we have evil hearts within us ; therefore let us not imagine for a moment that the most select position can screen us from the worst of sin.

The next thought is that *the greatest possible ability, apparently consecrated, is still nothing to rely upon* as a reason why we should not yet fall so low as to prostitute it all to the service of the worst of evils. Angels are beings of remarkable power. We know that they have amazing intelligence and beauty. We read of one whose face was like that of an angel of God. When a thing is spoken of as being exceedingly good, it is often connected with angels : "men did eat angels' food." It is supposed that everything with regard to them is of superior order and of refined quality. I suppose that a spirit that is not cumbered with flesh and blood, as we are, must be delivered from much that hampers and beclouds. Oftentimes a clear judgment is dimmed by a headache, or an attack of indigestion. Anything that affects the body drags down the mind ; but these angelic beings are delivered from such weakness, and they are clothed with a glory of strength, and beauty, and power.

Hear then and observe ! However great Lucifer was, he degenerated into Satan : the Son of the Morning became Apollyon the Destroyer. However excellent the fallen angels may once have been, they have now become potent only for mischief ; their wisdom has curdled into cunning, and their strength has soured into a vicious force ; so that no man may say within himself, "I am a clear thinker, therefore I shall never become a blaspheming infidel;" or, "I am gifted in prayer, therefore I shall never become a blasphemer." You know not what you may become. There is a great difference between gift in prayer and grace in prayer : gift will breed pride, and pride will ensure destruction ; it is only grace that can preserve unto eternal glory. There is also a great difference between office and person ; therefore, a man may not say, "I am a minister : I shall be kept faithful in the church of God." Ah me ! But we have seen leaders turn aside, and we need not marvel ; for if angels fall, what man may think that he can stand ? To trust our office as a security is to rest upon a broken reed. The grace of God can keep the least and weakest of us ; but apart from that heavenly power how dare any man hope to be preserved to the end ? Self-confidence is the beginning of declension. He that reckons that he is past

temptation, is already entangled in its net. We must never presume. Angels fell: why should not men? An angel occupies a high position near the throne of God: "Are they not all ministering spirits?" We have evidence in Scripture that they are called on grand occasions to discharge high commissions for the King of kings. And yet these courtiers, these household messengers of the palace of heaven, these domestics of glory, even these went astray, and fell, and turned to devils. Let no man dream that because he occupies an office in the church his salvation is therefore secure: an apostle fell. The arrows of the prince of darkness can reach the highest seats of the synagogue. The high places of the field of service are not free from danger; nay, they are the more perilous as they are the more notable. The powers of darkness make their direst onset upon the foremost soldiers of the cross, hoping to overthrow the standard-bearers, and create confusion throughout the camp.

Neither, dear friends—to continue my warning—*must any of us suppose that we shall be kept by the mere fact that we are engaged in the sublimest possible office.* Apart from the perpetual miracle of God's grace, nothing can keep us from declension, apostacy, and spiritual death. "Oh, but I spend my time," one may say—"I spend my time wholly in the service of God! I go from door to door seeking the lost souls of men, as a city missionary"; or "I conduct a large class in the school, and I have brought many to the Saviour." All this is good; but if thou trustest in it for thy standing before God it will certainly fail thee. If any one of us were to say, "But I am a minister, called to offer prayer, and to preach the precious word: my engagements are so sanctified, they bring me into such hallowed fellowship with holy things, that it is not possible that I should fall,"—this would be the height of folly. We need not go beyond the pale of professed ministers of Christ to find specimens of every infamy of which man is capable. After having preached to others there is grave cause for trembling lest we be castaways ourselves. No, there is nothing in the most sacred office in the church to preserve us or our characters. Office, if we trust in it, may even become, as in the case of Judas, a Tarpeian rock, from which we may be cast down to our destruction; for the angelic office in heaven did not keep the angels from being hurled over the battlements of glory when once they dared to sin. Let not the angels of the churches hope to be kept from falling unless he that beareth the seven stars in his right hand shall keep them even to the end.

I want you to notice, as a great warning, that *this sin of the angels was not prevented even by the fullest happiness.* Oh, what a change, dear friends, from the joy they once knew, when they were the servants of God, to being cast down to hell in chains of darkness, as they now are! The devils go about the world tempting men, but they are never released from their darkness. They cannot escape from the prison which they make for themselves—the blackness and horror of God's judgment which always shuts them in, be they where they may. What a difference between that and the throne of God, and the vision thereof, which was once their joy! The service of God was once theirs, but now the slavery of evil holds them in iron bonds. Once they took delight in the high praises of their Creator, and now they curse him in their heart

of hearts. Once, on high days, when the servants of God came together, they sang for joy as they beheld new worlds created by their great Lord and King; now, everything he does is as gall and wormwood to them. They curse him and themselves, and they are busily occupied always in seeking to pull down his kingdom, and to quench his light among the sons of men. Oh, the misery of these old offenders! They once were supremely happy; but this happiness of theirs did not suffice to preserve their fidelity. The most golden wages will not keep a servant loyal to the kindest of masters. The most blessed experience will not preserve a soul from sinning. You may come here and be greatly blessed under a sermon, and sweetly sing, and pray with intense fervour, and seem carried up to the gates of heaven by it; but do remember that no feelings of joy or happiness can be relied upon as sufficient holdfasts to keep us near the Lord. We have seen men drink of the cup of the Lord till they appeared to be full of love to him; and yet they have gone back to be drunken with the cup of devils. We have known men preach the gospel, and yet afterwards blaspheme every truth of revelation, and deny the inspiration of the Book of God. We have known them appear to be among the holiest and the best, and yet they have come at last to be common frequenters of the most evil haunts of the city, and to be ringleaders in folly. Is not this a dreadful thing, and should it not be a warning to every one of us? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." There is one who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before his presence with exceeding great joy; but if we do not trust in him, and abide in him, we shall perish. If we dare to confide in our position, our ability, our office, our service, or our experience, we shall, sooner or later, discover that we are prone to sin, and that when we sin God will not spare us any more than he spared the angels that sinned.

This warning, be it noted, applies itself to the very foulest of sin. The angels did not merely sin and lose heaven, but they passed beyond all other beings in sin, and made themselves fit denizens for hell. When Christ was describing the most wicked of men, he said that he was a devil. "One of you is a devil," was his expression; for the devil is the wickedest form of existence. Now, is it not singular that after being in heaven it remained possible for an angel to become so dreadful a being as a devil in hell now is? If any of us come very near to the kingdom, and yet the life of God is not in us; if we are joined with the church of God, and perform holy duties, and yet we depend upon ourselves, and so fall into sin, we may fall into the foulest of sins. I do not think that Judas could have been what he was if he had not been an apostle. The best of that which looks like goodness must be used as the raw material with which to make a traitor who will sell his Master. The devils have gone into open war with God: the same beings that once bowed before his awful majesty are now openly and defiantly at war with the God that made them. They once could sing their chorales with delight, and day without night circle the throne of God rejoicingly, but now they blaspheme, and rage, and rave against all that is good in earth or heaven. They go about like roaring lions seeking whom they may devour,—even they who once would have been ministering spirits, eager to save and bless. They were once loyal subjects, but now

they are traitors, rebels, seducers. They try to lead the people of God astray; they do their utmost to stir up sin in every human bosom. So bad have they become that their leader actually met the Son of God himself, and tempted him to fall down and worship him. Was ever such infamous, such infernal impudence as for the devil himself to ask the eternal Son of God to do him homage? O base proposal, that the purity of the Most High should bow itself before the impiety of a fallen spirit! Yet, so far have devils proceeded that in them evil has reached its ripeness and maturity. Let this be a lesson to us. I must not for a moment think that apart from the keeping of God's Spirit I am incapable even of the foulest sin. Recall the story of Hazael. When the prophet told him what he would do, he exclaimed in amazement, "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?" He was not only dog enough to seek the Syrian throne, but he was devil enough to suffocate his master with a wet cloth, and then to carry out with eagerness all those terrible deeds of barbarity which the prophet had foretold. We may yet do horrible deeds which we think ourselves incapable of doing. How much of devil there lies within the unregenerate heart no man can tell. O my unrenewed hearer, I would not slander thee, but I must warn thee: there are all the makings of a hell within thy heart! It only needs that the restraining hand of God should be removed, and thou wouldst come out in thy true colours, and those are the colours of iniquity. If it were not for the restraints of society and providence, there would be eruptions of evil, even in the most moral, sufficient to shake society to its foundations. An officer in India had tamed a leopard. From the time when it was quite a kitten he had brought it up, till it went about the house like a cat, and everybody played with it; but he was sitting in his chair one day asleep, and the leopard licked his hand—licked it in all innocence; but as he licked, the skin was broken, and the taste of blood came to the leopard, and from that moment it was not content to dwell with men. It rushed forth to kill, and was no more at ease till it reached the jungle. That leopard, though tamed, was a leopard still. So a man, sobered by moral motives, but unchanged in heart, is a fallen man still, and the taste of blood, I mean the taste of sin, will soon reveal the tiger in him. Wash a Russian, and you find a Tartar; tempt a moralist, and you discover a sinner! The thin crust of goodness, which is formed by education, soon disappears under temptation. You may be everything that looks like good, but except you have been born again you are still capable of the direst evil. It does seem a horrible thing to me that there should stream from a man's lips the foulest blasphemy, and yet he that utters it was once accustomed to sing in the house of God, and bow his knee with the saints. O God, that ever a creature bidding fair to serve his Maker, should sink to such a depth! Yet such horrors abound! The vessel which adorned the lordly festival is broken and thrown on the dunghill, and even so the excellent and honourable are defiled and cast away. I know what some are whispering, "I never should become an open reprobate!" How know you that? You already question the warnings of Scripture, you may go further before long. He that is the most sure is the most insecure; but he that cries, "Hold thou me up," shall be made to stand. Be this our con-

fession, "O Lord, I know that I shall become utterly vile except thy sovereign grace prevent!" In humility let us cast ourselves upon the mighty grace of God, and we shall be kept. In fervent earnestness let us cry to the strong for strength, and we shall not be overcome of evil. He that presumes shall fall; he that confides shall stand.

The text may lead us a little farther before we leave it, by giving us *a warning against the punishment of sin* as well as against the sin itself. Read this,—"God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell." They were very great; they were very powerful; but God did not spare them for that. If sinners are kings, princes, magistrates, millionaires, God will cast them into hell. If they were commanders of all the forces of the world, he that is a just and righteous judge would not spare them because of their dignities and powers. "God spared not the angels," why should he spare you, ye great ones of the earth? They were very numerous, too. I do not know how many there were, but we read of legions of devils on one occasion. But God did not spare angelic sinners because there were so many of them: he made room in hell for them all; and set them in darkness and in bonds, every one of them. God will not spare sinful men because of their millions: "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." Be they few or many, sinners must be punished, and God will not turn away his wrath from those who do iniquity. God did not spare the rebel angels because of their unity. I never heard of devils quarrelling: it is very wonderful in Scripture to notice their unanimity—their concord with one another; but "though hand join in hand, yet shall not the wicked go unpunished." You unbelievers may combine together to hate and oppose the gospel, but it matters not, God will deal with your confederacies and break up your unities, and make you companions in hell even as you have been comrades in sin. "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell."

Neither did he spare them because of their craft. There were never such subtle creatures as these are—so wise, so deep, so crafty; but these serpents and all the brood of them had to feel the power of God's vengeance, notwithstanding their cunning. Men often escape at the bar of their country because of their long-headed ways of evading the law; they keep within legal bounds, and yet are great villains; or if they go over the line they hire a clever tongue to plead for them, be they as guilty as they may, and through crafty pleading they escape from a righteous sentence. Thus is it with men, but no counsellors can pervert judgment with the Most High. He will deal out justice even to a hair's breadth, and he will by no means spare the guilty. "God spared not the angels that sinned:" why should he spare any guilty son of Adam? Be sure that he will not spare any one of us, if we live in sin. Unless we accept the way of salvation by Jesus Christ our sin will find us out, and God will find our sin out, and he will cast us also down to the place prepared for the devil and his angels. Let the flatterers of to-day preach what they may, the Lord will punish men who live and die in their sins. He spared not the angels that sinned; certainly he will not spare men if they sin. Let this stand as a warning to us.

II. But now I want to carry you on and ask all your attention to this second point for OUR ADMIRATION.

I want you to admire, dear friends, the fact that *though angels fell the saints of God are made to stand.* The angels sinned fatally; but the saints of God "cannot sin, for they are born of God." You know the sense in which the apostle means that; not that we do not all sin, but that we do not so sin as to depart from the living God, give up our allegiance to him, and cease to be his loving children. No. "He keepeth himself," says the Scripture, "and that wicked one toucheth him not." But what a wonder it is! I tell you, when the tales of God's people shall be written, and the records of the saints shall be read by the light of glory, we shall be miracles of grace to ourselves and to one another. "Oh," we shall say, "I had almost gone, but the hand of grace interposed, and snatched me from slipping over the awful precipice. My mind almost consented to that sin, and yet I was able to cry out, 'How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?' There was great stress of weather, and my poor barque was almost on the rocks; but still, though I grazed the bottom, yet I did not make shipwreck." "Oh, if I had been left at that moment," one will say, "what would have become of me? Though I had tasted of the heavenly gift, and the powers of the world to come, yet, had I been left to myself at that hour, I should have so fallen that I could never again have been brought to repentance. But I was kept; preserved by as great a miracle as if a spark should fall into the sea and yet burn on, or a straw should be blown into a heated furnace and should not be consumed, or a moth should be trodden on by a giant and yet remain uncrushed.

"Kept alive with death so near,
I to God the glory give."

To think that men should stand where angels fall! We are by sovereign grace called to be as near to God as the angels ever were, and in some respects we are nearer still. We are the body-guard of Christ; his chosen ones with whom he communes. We are the table-companions of our Lord; we eat of his bread, and drink of his cup, and are made partakers with him. We are lifted up to be one with him, and are made to be "members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones;" yet God's eternal unbounded power keeps us in the day of temptation, and leads us so that if we go through the rivers we are not drowned, and when we pass through the fires we are not burned. O, the splendour of triumphant grace! Neither the glory of our calling, nor the unworthiness of our original, shall cause us to be traitors; we shall neither perish through pride nor lust; but the new nature within us shall overcome all sin, and abide faithful to the end.

"Now, unto him that is able to keep us from falling, unto him be honour and glory, and dominion and power for ever and ever." I cannot look back on my past life without feeling the tears rush into my eyes at the remembrance of how I have been preserved in the trial-hour. We could not possibly tell, nor would we wish to tell in public, of those hours of weakness, those times of strong delusion, those moments of foot-slipping and of heart-fainting, which have happened to us. We grieve as we remember our worse than childish weaknesses. And yet we have not stained our garments; we have not dishonoured the holy name by which we are named; we have not been suffered to turn aside

from the straightness of our path so as to bring grief to the Holy Ghost and dishonour to the Church of God. Verily this is a wonder. Mr. Bunyan tells us that Christian by the light of day looked back on the Valley of the Shadow of Death which he had passed through in the night-time, and saw what a narrow path he had kept, and what a quag there was on one side, and what a miry place on the other, and where the hobgoblins were, and all the fiends of hell. When he looked back on it he was lost in admiration and gratitude. So it must be, and will be with you if through a dangerous way you have yet held on in your plain course, and have not turned from your integrity. We shall be brim full of gratitude and love. Grace shall reign unto eternal life. Redeemed men shall stand where angels fall, for God shall keep them. He is able to hold them up, and he will do it even to the end.

Now, let us learn another lesson full of admiration, and that is *that God should deal in grace with men and not with angels.*

> "From heaven the sinning angels fell,
> And wrath and darkness chained them down;
> But man, vile man, forsook his bliss,
> And mercy lifts him to a crown.
>
> "Amazing work of sovereign grace
> That could distinguish rebels so!
> Our guilty treasons called aloud
> For everlasting fetters too."

Now, you that do not believe in the doctrine of election, but kick at it, and bite your lips at the mention of it, listen to this! God gave fallen angels no Saviour, no gospel, no space for repentance, yet he gives these to men: why is this? What reason was there? Can you conceive one? Why did God pass the fallen angels by, and yet look in love upon the sons of men? "Oh," says one, "perhaps fallen angels were the greater offenders of the two." I do not think it; certainly many men go far to rival devils in rebellion.

"Perhaps men were tempted and angels were not." Stop, let us be clear on this point. Very likely Satan, the first angel that fell, was not tempted; but just as likely all the others were. Their leader tempted them as much as Eve tempted Adam, or the serpent tempted Eve. The mass of fallen angelhood may have been seduced by the example of Satan, the Prince of devils. I do not therefore see any great difference as to that matter. This I do know, that some men are greater sinners than devils. "No," say you, "how is that?" I answer that the devil never yet rejected free grace and dying love; the devil never yet struggled against the Holy Spirit in his own conscience; the devil never yet refused the mercy of God. These supreme pinnacles of wickedness are only reached by you who are hearers of the gospel, and yet cast its precious message behind your backs. Singular it is that God should deal in mercy with men who act so wickedly, while yet he never discoursed of mercy to the fallen angels, nor set before them terms of peace. They were given over there and then to be bound in chains of darkness until the judgment of the last great day.

Notice that God gave the angels no respite. He did not wait for

them to continue in sin for years; but when they sinned, they fell. The punishment followed hard on the crime. They cast God out of their hearts, and he cast them out of heaven. How different is his conduct to some of you! You have sinned through a series of years. How old are you? Twenty years? Thirty? Forty? Fifty? Sixty? Seventy? Is it eighty years that you have lived in rebellion against God? And yet he has not cut you down! Wonderful patience! The angels he banished from his presence at once. He spared not the angels, but he has spared you. Why is this?

The Lord never entered into any parley with the angels—never invited them to repentance or to mercy. Oh, but what parleys God has had with some of you! I am not the only one who has entreated and persuaded you, but yet with some of you I have pleaded very earnestly that you would turn from the error of your ways and live—that you would believe in Christ and find eternal life. But why should the Lord treat concerning peace with men and not with fallen angels?

For the angels God never made a covenant of grace, "ordered in all things and sure." They broke their covenant of works, and they fell never to rise again. For the angels there was never a sacrifice: no dying Son of God for them: no bloody sweat and wounded hands and feet for them! And yet a great atonement is prepared for men. What sovereignty of God's grace is here displayed! He opens the golden gates of love for us, and shuts the iron gate on beings nobler than we are. The Spirit of God strives with us, but he never strives with fallen angels. Devils are left to themselves; but concerning man the Lord cries "how can I give thee up?" How justly might God have left us alone, for we have been given unto idols, and yet he follows us with the admonitions of his mercy.

For the devils there is no pardon, no hope, no gate of heaven; and yet there is all this for men. Oh, dear hearers, do not, I pray you, reject these choice gifts of Almighty love. If God is so specially gracious to the race of men, let not man become singularly ungrateful to his God, presumptuously wanton in his sin. Let us turn unto the Lord with full purpose of heart, seeing that he turns to us with such speciality of favour.

I am sure that it is a great wonder and a thing for admiration that God should look upon us and not on fallen angels; because, as I have already said, angels certainly are not worse sinners than some men have been. Angels are not more wilful than we have been, for we have sinned against light and knowledge with deliberate intent and purpose.

Angels are certainly more valuable: if God had wanted one of the two races to be employed as his servants, the best would have been chosen, and these are not men, but angels. Angels can do more for God than we can: yet he has chosen us. Angels must, surely, be more missed than men: their downfall made a great gap in heaven. We go there to fill the space, and to repair the breach which was made when they were cast down from glory. But, surely, it were easier to restore the angels who came from heaven than to take up inferior creatures who had never been there. If we make a distinction between men in the distribution of our charity, we very properly say, "Let us do good to those first who would be the most miserable without it."

Now, men have never known heaven, and consequently cannot so much feel the loss of it as those who have been there and have fallen from it. We are like people that have always been poor; but the angels have been in heaven, and are therefore like wealthy persons who have come down to poverty. What a hell to them to be out of heaven! What misery to those spirits to miss the eternal glories which they once enjoyed! One would have thought, therefore, that God would have restored the angels before he upraised the human race. But he has not: he has redeemed us, and left the elder race of rebels unrestored. No man knoweth why, and in our amazement we cry,—How is this? Whence this election of grace?

Tell me, ye who would leave God no choice, but would deify the will of man, what all this means? Where is your proud theory that God is bound to treat all alike, as if we had a claim on God? I point you to the fallen angels, and what can you say?

Sometimes princes, when they mean to give pardon according to their will, say to themselves, "We will pardon the man who will be most dangerous if we leave him to be our enemy." Now, bad as men are, and great enemies of God as they become, yet the devil has more power to harm God than a man can have; and yet God does not pardon the devil. He lets Satan go on with all his dreadful power and do his worst in reviling his Lord; and yet the Lord's mercy comes to us whose powers are within so narrow a range, compared with the fallen angels; he makes choice of puny man to receive his grace.

One would think that to restore an angel was more easy and more agreeable to the plan of the universe than to exalt fallen man. There is nothing to do but to put an angel back in his place; but men must be taken into a new existence. Christ himself must come and be a man; and, to wash away the sin of man, Christ must die; nothing more could have been needed had devils been saved. I cannot conceive the salvation of angels to be more difficult than the salvation of men; I rather conceive it to have been the easier thing of the two if the Lord had so willed it. And yet, involving as it did the incarnation of the Son of God and his death to make atonement, the infinitely gracious Father condescended to ordain that he would take up men, and would not take up the fallen angels. It is a marvel: it is a mystery. I put it before you for your admiration. Oh, sirs, do not despise it! Let not such amazing sovereignty of grace be treated with contempt by any one of us. Talk no more about the injustice of the election of certain men, for if you do the devils will bear witness that you are cavilling at the royal prerogative of the great Lord who saith, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

Now, I think that I see in this *a great argument with God's people.* Has the Lord given up angels and chosen you? It reminds me of that famous text, "Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee. Therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. I gave Egypt for thy ransom; Ethiopia and Seba for thee." See, he has passed angels by, and he has made choice of us; what a height of grace! Behold how he loves us! What shall we do in return? Let us do angels' work. Come, brothers and

sisters, let us glow with such a fire of devotion as might have burned in an angel's heart. Let us be as intensely zealous as a redeemed angel might have been. Let us glorify God as angels would have done had they been restored and made again to taste divine favour and infinite love. What manner of people ought we to be? What manner of lives ought we to live? What manner of consecration ought to be upon us? Should not our whole being live unto God?

I have given you this somewhat in the rough, for time flies; but think it over, and profit by it. Think it over, you ungodly ones, and not cast away mercy like this. When you read, "He took not up angels, but he took up the seed of Abraham," be full of surprise, and fly at once to Jesus. And, O ye saints, as ye read it, say to yourselves—

"For more love than seraphs know
We will like seraphs burn."

God bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xvii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—261, 668, 369.

TO MY CONGREGATION OF HEARERS AND READERS.

By the great mercy of God I was permitted to leave my house on Tuesday and commence my journey to the South of France. It seemed impossible for me to recover while in our trying climate, and so, in great weakness, I have ventured to make a move. I beg your prayers for my recovery, and especially for the sanctification of my grievous pains, so that they may turn out to be for God's glory. Week by week I shall carefully prepare these Sermons, and I hope they will be attended with the divine blessing. In them I hope to keep up my communion with thousands of dear friends, though we are divided by many a league.

Friends at the Tabernacle, I have heard of one enthusiastic friend who so misses my ministry that *he wished he could fall asleep till I return.* That is exactly what I hope you will not do. Be doubly alive. Seek for a revival of religion: labour for it. Everything passes through the fire while the Builder is absent; let it be seen that our building is not wood, hay, and stubble, which will disappear, but precious metal that will remain to the glory of God. KEEP UP THE PRAYER-MEETINGS. Sustain every holy work. Live near to God. Continue in concord. Devote yourselves wholly unto the Lord.

With Christian love to my dear hearers and readers,

I am yours, for I am Christ's,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CORDS AND CART-ROPES.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 8TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON DECEMBER 14TH, 1884.

"Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope."—Isaiah v. 18.

THE text begins with "Woe;" but when we get a woe in this book of blessings it is sent as a warning, that we may escape from woe. God's woes are better than the devil's welcomes. God always means man's good, and only sets ill before him that he may turn from the dangers of a mistaken way, and so may escape the ill which lies at the end of it. Think me not unkind at this time because my message sounds harshly, and has a note in it of sorrow rather than of joy. It may be most for your pleasure for ages to come, dear friends, to be for a while displeased. It may make the bells ring in your ears for ever if to-night, instead of the dulcet sound of the harp, you hear the shrill clarion startling you to thoughtfulness. Mayhap "Woe, woe, woe," though it should sound with a dreadful din in your ear, may be the means of leading you to seek and find your Saviour, and then throughout eternity no woe shall ever come near to you. May the good Spirit of all grace put power into my warning, that you may profit by it.

This is a very singular text. It is not very easy to understand it at first sight. Here are some who are said to draw sin with cords of vanity, which are slender enough, and yet they also draw it as with a cart-rope, which is thick enough. They are harnessed to sin, and the traces appear to be fragile, insignificant, and soon broken. You can hardly touch them, for they are a mere sham, a fiction—vanity. What can be thinner and weaker than cobweb-cords of vanity? Yet when you attempt to break or remove them they turn out to be cart-ropes or wagon-traces, fitted to bear the pull of horse or bullock. Motives which have no logical force, and would not bind a reasonable man for a moment, are, nevertheless, quite sufficient to hold the most of men in bondage. Such a slave is man to iniquity, that unworthy motives and

indefensible reasons which appear no stronger than little cords nevertheless hold him as with bonds of steel, and he is fastened to the loaded wagon of his iniquity as a horse is fastened by a cart-rope. That is our subject at this time, and may God make it useful to many. Beyond all things I would have you saved, you who are tugging away in the harness of sin. God grant it. May the free Spirit set you free.

I shall first of all *explain the singular description*—explain it by enlarging upon it, and quoting instances from daily life. Secondly, I shall enlarge upon *the woe that is certainly connected with being bound to sin;* and then thirdly, as God shall help me, *I will encourage you to get out of the traces.* I pray that you may have these cart-ropes cut, that you may not be drawing iniquity and sin after you any longer. Oh that this might be salvation's hour to many of you, in which, like Samson, you may break the cords and ropes with which you have been bound!

I. First, let us EXPLAIN THE SINGULAR DESCRIPTION. Here are persons harnessed to the wagon of sin—harnessed to it by many cords, all light as vanity and yet strong as cart-ropes.

Let me give you a picture. Here is a man, who, as a young man, heard the gospel and grew up under the influence of it. He is an intelligent man, a Bible reader, and somewhat of a theologian. He attended a Bible class, was an apt pupil, and could explain much of Scripture, but *he took to lightness and frothiness.* He made an amusement of religion and a sport of serious things. Sermons he frequented that he might talk of them and say that he had heard the preacher. After the sermon, when others were impressed, he was merry. He had discovered some mistake in the preacher, in his pronunciation, in the grammatical construction of a sentence, or in a misquotation from a poet, and this he mentioned with gusto, passing by all the good that was spoken. That was only his way: he did not mean any hurt by it; at least, he would have said so had any one seriously reproved him.

He came under the bond of this religious trifling, but it was a cord of vanity small as a packthread. Years ago he began to be bound to his sin by this kind of trifling, and at the present moment I am not sure that he ever cares to go and hear the gospel or to read the word of God, for he has grown to despise that which he sported with. The wanton witling has degenerated into a malicious scoffer: his cord has become a cart-rope. His life is all trifling now. You could not make him serious. He spends his time in one perpetual giggle. Every holy thing is now the subject of comedy. Like Belshazzar, he drinks his wine out of the sacred vessels of the temple. Earnestness hath a pleasantry of its own, and a bold spirit yokes mirth and laughter to its car, and subdues all the faculties of the mind to God, not even excepting humour; but this man owns no Lord within his heart, but laughs at the most solemn truths and does not seem capable of anything higher or better. His life is a sneer. He would pull a feather out of an angel's wing and wear it in his cap. On the solemn day of Pentecost he would have drawn a picture of the cloven tongues upon his thumb nail that he might show it as a curiosity. There is nothing sacred to him now, nor will there be till he is in hell, and then he will have done with his jibes and flouts. The habit of being contemptuous has grown to be a cart-rope with him,

and it holds him most securely. I say, young men, break those wretched cords of vanity before they strengthen into cart-ropes. While yet there is but a slender thread snap it, before thread gathers to thread, and that to another, and that to another, till it has come to be a cable, which even a giant could not pull asunder. There are many lamentable instances of triflers ripening into scoffers, and it were a great pity that you should furnish further illustrations. Avoid trifling with religion as you would avoid common swearing or profanity, for in its essence it is irreverent and mischievous.

I have seen the same thing take another shape, and then it appeared as *captious questioning*. We are not afraid to be examined upon anything in the Word of God; but we dread a cavilling spirit. I, for one, believe that the more the Word of God has been sifted the more fully has it been confirmed. The result has been the better understanding of its teaching. The pure gold has shone the more brightly for being placed in the crucible. But there is a habit which begins thus—"I do not see *this;* and I do not understand *that;* and I do not approve of *this;* and I question *that.*" It makes life into a tangle of thorns and briars where ten thousand sharp points of doubt are for ever tearing the mind. This doubting state reminds one of the old serpent's "Yea, hath God said?" If the statement made had been the opposite, the gentleman would have questioned it; for he is bound to doubt everything. He is one who could take either side and refute; but neither side and defend. He could do like the eminent barrister, who had made a mistake as to his side of the case, and he got up and gave all the arguments most tellingly, till his client's lawyer whispered to him, "You have done for us, you have used all the arguments against your own client." The barrister stopped and said, "My lord, I have thus told you all that can be urged against my client by those upon the other side, and I will now show you that there is nothing in the allegations;" and with equal cleverness he went on to disprove what he had proved before. There are minds constructed in such a way that they can act in every way except that of plain up and down. Their machinery is eccentric, it would puzzle the ablest tongue to describe it. I like the old-fashioned consciences that go up and down, yes and no, right and wrong, true and false—the kind which are simple and need no great intellect to understand their methods. We are growing so cultured now that many have become like the old serpent, "more subtle than any beast of the field." The new-fashioned consciences act upon the principle of compromise and policy, which is no principle at all. To each enquiry they answer, "Yes and no. What is the time of day?" for it is yes or no according to the clock, or according to the climate, or more generally according to the breeches' pocket, for so much depends upon that. Practically many are saying, "Upon which side of the bread is the butter? Tell us this, and then we will tell you what we believe." People of that sort begin at first with an enquiring spirit, then go on to an objecting spirit, then to a conceited spirit, and then to a perpetually quibbling spirit. In the case to which I refer, there is nothing earnest; for when a man is a sincere questioner, and is willing to receive an answer, he is on the high road to truth; but when he merely questions and questions and questions, and never stops for an

answer, and is nothing but a heap of cavils, he is not worth clearing away. The last thing he wants is an answer, and the thing he dreads beyond everything is that he should be compelled to believe anything at all. Such a man at last gets bound as with a cart-rope: he becomes an atheist or worse; for all capacity for faith departs from him. He is as frivolous as Voltaire, whose forte seemed to lie in ridiculing everything. You cannot save him. How can faith come to him? How can he believe who must have everything explained? How can he believe in Christ himself when he requires him, first of all, to be put through a catechism and to be made to answer cavils? Oh, take heed of tying up your soul with cart-ropes of scepticism; take heed of a truth-denying spirit. God help you to break the bonds. Enquire, but believe. Ask, but do accept the truth; and be in earnest in your resolve that if you prove all things you will also hold fast that which is good. To be always using the sieve but never to be using the mill is starving work: to be always searching after adulterations, but never to drink of the genuine milk, is a foolish habit. Cavilling is a curse, and carping is a crime. Escape from it while yet it is but as a cord of vanity, lest it come to be a cart-rope which shall bind you fast.

I hear one say, "This does not touch me. I have not fallen either into trifling or into questioning." No, but perhaps you may be a prisoner bound with other cords. Some have *a natural dislike to religious things* and cannot be brought to attend to them. Let me qualify the statement and explain myself. They are quite prepared to attend a place of worship and to hear sermons, and occasionally to read the Scriptures, and to give their money to help on some benevolent cause; but this is the point at which they draw the line—they do not want to think, to pray, to repent, to believe, or to make heart-work of the matter. Thinking, you know, is awkward work, and to them it is uncomfortable work, because there is not much in their lives that would cheer them if they were to think of it. They had rather not see the nakedness of the land. There is an ugly thing which they do not want to have much to do with—called repentance: of this they require much, but they are averse to it. The more children dislike medicine the more they want it; and it is the same with repentance. These people would rather shut their eyes and go on to destruction than stop and see their danger and turn back. To think about the past—why, they might have to mourn it, and who is eager after sorrow? Then there is such a thing as a change of heart, and they are rather shy of *that*, for they are almost heartless and do not like prying deep. If there were something to be done that could be managed in a day or two, if there were some pilgrimage to make, some penance to endure, some dress to be worn, they would not mind that; but thought, repentance, prayer, and seeking God—they cannot endure such spiritual exactions. If there were some sacrifice to be made, they would do that; but this being at peace with God, this seeking to be renewed in the spirit of their mind—well, they have no mind to it. The world is in their hearts and they have no wish to get it out. They have heard some people say that all conversation about God, the soul, and eternity is dull Puritanic talk, so they have picked up an expression as parrots often do, and they say "No, we do not want to be Puritans. We do not care to be extra precise and righteous over much." What a misery it is that

there should be persons who are bound with such cords of vanity as those! These are unreasonable feelings, insane aversions, unjustifiable prejudices: the Lord save you from them, and instead thereof give you a mind to know him, and a heart to seek after him. Why, as a boy, when I began to feel a sense of sin within me, I resolved that if there was such a thing as being born again, I would never rest until I knew it. My heart seemed set upon knowing what repentance meant and what faith meant, and getting to be thoroughly saved; but now I find that large numbers of my hearers back out of all serious dealing with themselves and God: they act as if they did not wish to be made happy for eternity. They think hardly of the good way. You see it is such radical work: regeneration cuts so deep, and it makes a man so thoughtful. Who knows what may have to be given up? Who knows what may have to be done? O, my hearer, if you indulge in such demurs and delays and prejudices in the first days of your conviction, the time may come when those little packthreads will be so intertwisted with each other that they will make a great cart-rope, and you will become an opposer of everything that is good, determined to abide for ever harnessed to the great Juggernaut car of your iniquities, and so to perish. God save you from that.

I have known some men get harnessed to that car in another way, and that is by *deference to companions*. The young man liked everything that was good after a fashion, but he could not bear for anybody to say on Monday morning, "So you were at a place of worship on Sunday." He did not like to say outright, "Of course I was; where were you?" But the rather he said,—Well, he did look in at the chapel, or he did go to St. Paul's or the Abbey to hear the music. "Oh," says one, "I hear you were at the Tabernacle the other day." Yes, he went in from curiosity, just to see the place and the crowd. That is how he puts it, as if he were ashamed to worship his Maker and to be found observing the Sabbath-day. O, poor coward! That young man at another time was charged with having been seen in the enquiry room, or weeping under a solemn sermon. He said it was rather affecting, and he was a little carried away and over-persuaded, but he apologised to the devil and begged that he might hear no more of it. He began giving way to his ungodly friends, and soon he became their butt. One companion pulled his ear that way, and another pulled his ear another way, and in this manner he developed very long ears indeed. He did not go very far wrong at first; but having allowed sinful men to saddle him, they took care to ride him harder and harder as the days ran on. It was only a packthread sort of business that held him to sin by a kind of wicked courtesy; but after a while he became obsequious to his equals, and fawned upon his superiors, doing their bidding even though it cost him his soul. He was vastly more attentive to the will and smile of some downright vicious comrade—far more thoughtful of a fool's opinion—than he was of the good pleasure of God. It is a shocking thing; but there is no doubt that many people go to hell for the love of being respectable. It is not to be doubted that multitudes pawn their souls, and lose their God and heaven, merely for the sake of standing well in the estimation of a profligate. Young women have lost their souls for very vanity, sinning in the hope of securing the love of a brainless,

heartless youth. Young men have flung away all hope of salvation in order that they might be thought to be men of culture; they have abjured faith in order to be esteemed "free-thinkers" by those whose opinions were not worth a pin's head. I charge you, dear friend, if you are beginning at all to be a slave of other people, break these wretched and degrading bonds. I scorn that mental slavery in which many glory. What matters it to me to-day what anybody thinks of me? In this respect I am the freest of men. Yet do I know times when, had I yielded to the packthread, I should soon have felt the cart-rope. He who sins to please his friend is making for himself a slavery more cruel than the negro ever knew. He that would be free for ever must break the cords ere yet they harden into chains.

Some men are getting into bondage in another way; *they are forming gradual habits of evil.* How many young men born and bred amid Christian associations do that! It is a little sip, and such a little. "I do not take above half a glass." Then why run such great risks for so small an indulgence? "The doctor"—O you doctors, what you have got to answer for!—"the doctor says I ought to take a little, and so I do." By-and-by the little thread becomes a cart-rope: the tale about the doctor ends in doing what no doctor would justify. Will he say, "The doctor says I ought" when he comes rolling home at night, scarce can find his way to bed, and wakes up with a headache in the morning? He would have done better to ask God for grace to escape while yet he had small pleasure in the fascinating fire-water, and was the master of his appetite. The cart-rope is hard to break, as many have found, though I would encourage even these by God's grace to struggle for liberty.

"Well," says the young man, "that is not my sin." I am glad it is not; but any other sin if it be persevered in will destroy you. I will not try to describe your sin. Describe it yourself, and think over it; but will you please recollect the deceitfulness of sin—the way in which it comes to men, as the frost in the still evening in the wintry months comes to the lake? The pool is placid, and the frost only asks that it may thinly glaze the surface. The coating is so thin, you could scarce call it ice; but having once filmed the pool, the sheet of ice has commenced; soon it is an inch thick, and in a few hours a loaded wagon might pass over it without a crash, for the whole pool seems turned to marble. So men give way to one evil passion or another—this vice or that; and the habit proceeds from bad to worse, till the cords of vanity are enlarged into cart-traces, and they cannot escape from the load to which they are harnessed.

I fear that not a few are under the delusive notion that they are safe as they are. *Carnal security* is made up of cords of vanity. How can a sinner be safe while his sin is unforgiven? How can he be at peace while he is a slave to evil, and an enemy to God? Yet many fancy that they are as good as need be, and far better than their neighbours. Surely such as they are must surely be secure, since they are so respectable, so well inclined, and so much thought of. A man may accustom himself to danger till he does not even notice it, and a soul may grow used to its condition till it sees no peril in impenitence and unbelief. As the blacksmith's dog will lie down and sleep while the sparks fly about him, so will a gospel-hardened sinner sleep on under warnings and pleadings.

At first the hearer had to do violence to his conscience to escape from the force of truth, but at last he is encased in steel, and no arrow of the word can wound him. O ye that are at ease in Zion, I beseech you listen to my admonition and fly from carnal security. O Lord, arouse them from their slumbering condition!

This is a word of warning. I have not the time to-night to go into all the details. I wish I had. Beware of the eggs of the cockatrice. Remember how drops wear stones, and little strokes fell great oaks. Do not play with a cobra, even if it be but a foot long. Keep from the edge of the precipice. Fly from the lion ere he springs upon you. Do not forge for yourself a net of iron, nor become the builder of your own prison-house. May the Holy Ghost deliver you. May you touch the cross, and find in it the power which will loose you and let you go.

II. But, oh, how I wish that every person here who has not yet found liberty, but is harnessed to his sin, could escape to-night, for—and this is my second point—THERE IS A WOE ABOUT REMAINING HARNESSED TO THE CART OF SIN, and that woe is expressed in our text.

It has been hard work already to tug at sin's load. If I am addressing any here that have fallen into great sin, I know that you have fallen into great sorrow. I am sure you have. Much of history is happily covered with a veil so that its secret griefs do not become open miseries, else were the world too wretched for a tender heart to live in it. Could we lift the tops of the houses, could we exhibit the skeletons hidden in closets, could we take away the curtains from human breasts—what sorrows we should see; and the mass of those sorrows—not the whole of them, but the mass—would be found to come from sin. When the young man turns to paths of unchastity or of dishonesty, what grief he makes for himself: what woe, what misery! His bodily disease, his mental anguish we have no heart to describe. Ah! yes, "The way of transgressors is hard." They put on a smile; they even take to uproarious laughter, but a worm is gnawing at their hearts. Alas, poor slaves! They make a noise as they try to drown their feelings; but as the crackling of thorns under a pot such is the mirth of the wicked—hasty, noisy, momentary; gone, and nothing but ashes left. I would not have you proceed in the path of sin if there were nothing in it worse than what has happened to you already. Surely the time past may suffice for folly: you have reaped enough of the fire-sheaves without going on with the harvest. I would as a brother urge you to escape from your present bondage.

But remember, if you remain harnessed to this car of sin, *the weight increases*. You are like a horse that has to go a journey and pick up parcels at every quarter of a mile: you are increasing the heavy luggage and baggage that you have to drag behind you. A man starting in life is somewhat like a horse with but a slender load in the cart, but as he goes on from youth to manhood, and from manhood to his riper years, he has been loaded up with more sin; and what a weight there is behind him now! Grinning devils, as they bring the heavy packages and heap them up one upon another, must wonder that men are such fools as to continue in the harness and drag on the dreadful load as if it were fine sport. Alas, that men should sin away their souls so lightly, as if self-destruction were some merry game that they were playing at, whereas

it is a heaping up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the perdition of ungodly men.

Further, I want you to notice that as the load grows heavier, so *the road becomes worse*, the ruts are deeper, the hills are steeper, and the sloughs are more full of mire. In the heyday of youth man finds beaded bubbles about the brim of his cup of sin, the wine moveth itself aright, it giveth its colour in the cup ; but as he grows older and drinks deeper he comes nearer to the dregs, and those dregs are as gall and wormwood. An old man with his bones filled with the sin of his youth is a dreadful sight to look upon; he is a curse to others, and a burden to himself. A man who has fifty years of sin behind him is like a traveller pursued by fifty howling wolves. Do you hear their deep bay as they pursue the wretch ? Do you see their eyes glaring in the dark, and flaming like coals of fire ? Such a man is to be pitied indeed: whither shall he flee, or how shall he face his pursuers? He who goes on carelessly when he knows that such a fate awaits him is a fool, and deserves small pity when the evil day comes. O you that are drawing the wagon of sin, I implore you stop before you reach the boggy ways of infirmity, the tremendous swamps of old age!

Remember, friends, if any of you are still harnessed to your sins, and have been so for years, the day will come when *the load will crush the horse.* It is a dreadful thing when the sins which were drawn at last drive the drawer before them. In the town where I was brought up there is a very steep hill. You could scarcely get out of the town without going down a hill, but one is specially precipitous, and I remember once hearing a cry in the streets, for a huge wagon had rolled over the horses that were going down the hill with it. The load had crushed the creatures that were supposed to draw it. There comes a time with a man when it is not so much he that consumes the drink as the drink that consumes him ; he is drowned in his cups, sucked down by that which he himself sucked in. A man was voracious, perhaps, in food, and at last his gluttony swallowed him ; at one grim morsel he went down the throat of the old dragon of selfish greed. Or the man was lustful, and at last his vice devoured him. It is an awful thing when it is not the man that follows the devil, but the devil that drives the man before him as though he were his laden ass. The man's worst self, that had been kept in the rear and put under restraint, at last gets up and comes to the front, and the better self, if ever he had such, is dragged on an unwilling captive at the chariot wheels of its destroyer.

I am sure that there is nobody here who desires to be eternally a sinner: let him then beware, for *each hour of sin brings its hardness and its difficulty of change.* Nobody here wants to get into such a condition that he cannot help any longer sinning: let him not be so unwise as to play with sin. When the moral brakes are taken off, and the engine is on the down-grade, and must run on at a perpetually quickening rate for ever, then is the soul lost indeed. I am sure there is not a man here who wants to commit himself to an eternity of hate of God, an eternity of lust, an eternity of wickedness and consequent wretchedness. Why then do you continue to harden your hearts ? If you do not wish to rush down the decline, put on the brake to-night:

God help you so to do; or, to come back to the text, let the pack-threads be broken, and the cords of vanity be thrown aside, ere yet the cart-rope shall have fastened you for ever to the Juggernaut car of your sin and your destruction.

III. Now I want to offer some ENCOURAGEMENT FOR BREAKING LOOSE. It is time I did. I do not wish to preach a sad unhappy sermon to-night; but I do long to see everybody here saved from sin. My heart cries to God that as long as I am able to preach, I may not preach in vain. God knows I have never shunned to speak what I have thought, and to speak very plainly and very home to you. I never come into this pulpit with the notion that I must not say a sharp thing, or somebody will be offended, and I must not deal with common sins, for somebody will say that I am coarse. I care not the snap of a finger what you choose to say about me, if you will but forsake sin and be reconciled to God by the death of his Son. That is the one and only thing my heart craves, and for that end I have given earnest warnings at this time. I may not much longer be spared to speak with you, and therefore I am the more earnest to impress you while I may. Help me, O Spirit of God!

Now, listen. *There is hope for every harnessed slave of Satan.* There is hope for those who are most securely bound. "Oh," you say, "I am afraid that I have got into the cart-rope stage; for I seem bound to perish in my sin, I cannot break loose from it." Listen. Jesus Christ has come into the world to rescue those who are bound with chains. That is to say, God himself has taken upon himself human nature, with this design—that he may save men from their sins. That blessed, perfect babe, such as never mother before had ever seen,—that virgin's child—when they named him, it was said, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." He has come to this world in our nature on purpose to save men from their sins. He can cut the traces which bind you to Satan's chariot. He can take you out of the shafts. He can set you free to-night. You have been dragging on for years, and you think there is no chance for you; but there is more than a chance, there is the certainty of salvation if you trust in Jesus. I remember reading a famous writer's description of a wretched cab-horse which was old and worn out and yet kept on its regular round of toil. They never took him out of harness for fear they should never be able to get his poor old carcase into it again. He had been in the shafts for so many years that they feared if they took him out of them he would fall to pieces, and so they let him keep where he was accustomed to be. Some men are just like that. They have been in the shafts of sin so many years that they fancy that if they were once to alter they would drop to pieces. But it is not so, old friend. We are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation. The Lord will make a new creature of you. When he cuts the traces and brings you out from between those shafts which have so long held you, you will not know yourself. When old things have passed away you will be a wonder unto many. Is it not said of Augustine that after his conversion he was met by a fallen woman who had known him in his sin, and he passed her by? She said, "Austin, it is I;" and he turned and said, "But I am not Austin.

I am not the man you once knew, for I have become a new creature in Christ Jesus." That is what the Lord Jesus Christ can do for you. Do you not believe it? It is true, whether you believe it or not. Oh that you would look to Jesus and begin to live! It is time a change was made; is it not? Who can change you but the Lord Jesus?

Let me tell you another thing that ought to cheer you, and it is this. You are bound with the cords of sin, and in order that all this sin of yours might effectually be put away, the *Lord Jesus, the Son of the Highest, was himself bound.* They took him in the garden of Gethsemane, and bound his hands, and led him off to Pilate and Herod. They brought him bound before the Roman governor. He was bound when they scourged him. He was bound when they brought him forth bearing his cross. He was fastened hand and foot as they drove in the nails, and thus fixed him with rivets of iron to his cross. There did he hang, fastened to the cruel tree, for sinners such as you are. If you come and trust him to-night you shall find that for you he endured the wrath of God, for you he paid the penalty of death, that he might set you free. He bore it that you should not bear it: he died for you that you might not die. His substitution shall be your deliverance. Oh, come, all bound and guilty as you are, and look to his dear cross, and trust yourself with him; and you shall be set free.

God grant that it may be done at this very moment.

I will tell thee another cheering fact to help thee to overcome thy sin, and break the cart-ropes that now bind thee,—*There is in this world a mysterious Being whom thou knowest not, but whom some of us know, who is able to work thy liberty.* There dwells upon this earth a mysterious Being, whose office it is to renew the fallen, and restore the wandering. We cannot see him, or hear him, yet he dwells in some of us, as Lord of our nature. His chosen residence is a broken heart and a contrite spirit. That most powerful Being is God, the third person of the blessed Trinity, the Holy Ghost, who was given at Pentecost and who has never been recalled, but remains on earth to bless the people of God. He is here still; and wherever there is a soul that would be free from sin this free Spirit waits to help him. Wherever there is a spirit that loathes its own unholiness, this Holy Spirit waits to cleanse him. Wherever there is a groaning one asking to be made pure, this pure Spirit is ready to come and dwell in him, and make him pure as God is pure. O, my hearer, he waits to bless you now: he is blessing you while I speak. I feel as if his divine energy went forth with the word and entered into your soul as you are listening. I trust I am not mistaken. If thou believest in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, believe thou also in the power of the Holy Spirit to make thee a new creature, and cleanse thee, and deliver thee from every fetter, and make thee the Lord's free man.

I will tell thee one thing more, and I will have done. *Our experience should be a great encouragement to you.* I have tried to preach to you that are in the traces; poor worn-out cab-horses to the devil, post-horses of Satan that seem never to have a holiday, dragging your cart of sin behind you through the slush of the foul city of Vanity. The mercy is that you are not horses, but men born for nobler purposes. You may be free, for some of us are free. Oh, what a load I had behind me once: my wagon of imbred sin was a huge one indeed. Had it not been for

the grace of God I should have perished in the impossible attempt to move it. I do not think that my load as to overt sin was at all like that which some of you are dragging, for I was but a child, and had not yet plunged into the follies of the world ; but then I had a dogged will, a high spirit, an intense activity, and a daring mind, and all this would have driven me headlong to perdition if the Spirit of God had not wrought in me to subdue me to the will of the Lord. I felt within my spirit the boilings up of that secret cauldron of corruption which is in every human bosom ; and I felt that I was ruined before God, and that there was no hope for me. My burden of inward sin at fifteen years of age was such that I knew not what to do. We have seen pictures of the Arabs dragging those great Nineveh bulls for Mr. Leyard, hundreds of them tugging away ; and I have imagined how Pharaoh's subjects, the Egyptians, must have sweated and smarted when they had to drag some of the immense blocks of which his obelisks were composed,—thousands of men dragging one block of masonry; and I seemed to have just such a load as that behind me, and it would not stir. I prayed, and it would not stir. I took to reading my Bible, but my load would not stir. It seemed stuck in the mire, and no struggling would move the awful weight. Deep ruts the wheels were in. My load would not be moved, and I did not know what to do. I cried to God in my agony, and I thought I must die if I did not get delivered from my monstrous cumber: but it would not stir. I have no drag behind me now. Glory be to God, I am not bound with a cart-rope to the old wagon. I have no hamper behind me, and as I look back for the old ruts where the cart stopped so long I cannot even see their traces. The enormous weight is not there! It is clean gone! There came One by who wore a crown of thorns: I knew him by the marks in his hands and in his feet; and he said, "Trust me, and I will set thee free." I trusted him, and the enormous weight behind me was gone. It disappeared. As I was told, it sank into his sepulchre, and it lies buried there, never to come out again. My cart-rope snapped, my cords of vanity melted, I was out of harness. Then I said, "The snare is broken, and my soul hath escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler. I will tell the story of my deliverance as long as I live." I can say to-night,

> "E'er since by faith I saw the stream
> His flowing wounds supply,
> Redeeming love has been my theme,
> And shall be till I die."

Oh, my beloved hearers, believe in Christ as I did. The gospel comes to each sorrowing sinner, and it says,—Trust the Saviour and there is joy for thee. There is but a veil of gauze between thee and peace ; move the hand of faith, and that veil will be torn to pieces. There is but a step between thy misery and music and dancing and a life of perpetual delights ; take that step out of self and into Christ, and all is changed for ever. Ask Jesus to break thy bonds, and with a touch of his pierced hand, he will make thee free as the swallow on the wing which no cage can hold. Thou shalt see *him*, and see thy sin never again for ever.

God bless thee, and break the cart-ropes, and remove the cords of vanity, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

"Listen now! the Lord hath done it!
For he loved us unto death;
It is finished! He has saved us!
Only trust to what he saith.
He hath done it! Come and bless him,
Spend in praise your ransomed breath
Evermore and evermore.

"Oh, believe the Lord hath done it!
Wherefore linger? Wherefore doubt?
All the cloud of black transgression
He himself hath blotted out.
He hath done it! Come and bless him,
Swell the grand thanksgiving shout,
Evermore and evermore."

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah v.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—235, 587, 553.

TO MY HEARERS AND READERS.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Owing to delays upon the road, I only reached this place on Saturday night, wearied and weak; but this morning I am refreshed, and hope to rest in real earnest. I should not sit down to write these lines were it not for the importunate requests of many friends who are so kindly interested in me. It is a joy to live in the hearts of others, and to be thought of by them. But what is to be said of the great privilege of being thought upon of the Lord? "This honour have all the saints." Each one of them may say, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me." Hence he delights to hear from us because his delight is in us. What joy lies in the assurance that his thoughts towards us are thoughts of peace, and not of evil! "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!" We are often wandering in thought, or we are cast down, and doubtful, and anxious; but he saith, "My thoughts are not your thoughts." "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from thee."

In this confidence let us possess our souls. Our lives, our cares, our trials, our concerns are all considered by a love which never grows cold, a wisdom which never mistakes, and a power which never fails. Wherefore, let us have delight in the Almighty, and lift up our faces unto God, seeing he taketh pleasure in his people, and remembers them in their low estate with a mercy which endureth for ever.

Yours in the ever-remembering Father,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, February 1st.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

CERTAIN CURIOUS CALCULATIONS ABOUT LOAVES AND FISHES.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 15TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON OCTOBER 30TH, 1884.

"When I brake the five loaves among five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? They say unto him, Twelve. And when the seven among four thousand, how many baskets full of fragments took ye up? And they said, Seven. And he said unto them, How is it that ye do not understand?"—Mark viii. 19—21.

THE disciples had come on board the vessel, and had forgotten to bring bread with them: good men's memories sometimes fail them. For that reason they were greatly disturbed in mind, and they supposed that Jesus was disquieted also, and that he had shaped his speech so as to give them an indirect rebuke when he mentioned the leaven of the Pharisees. How little they understood his mind, though they had been so long time with him! His thoughts were not occupied about bread for himself; neither was there any carking care in his heart about bread for them. His mind was at perfect rest about all secular things; and even as to all spiritual things he was by no means tossed about. Notwithstanding all his trials and his sorrows, I suppose that there never was a serener mind than that of Jesus Christ our Lord. His heart was great as an ocean, and though visited with terrible tempests, yet was it the Pacific Ocean still. *They* might be troubled about bread, but he was resting about that and all things else. The winds which tossed the lakelets of their little minds into boiling cauldrons did not suffice to create a ripple upon the surface of his mighty soul.

Is it not well for us at this hour that it is so? We are fluttered and dismayed, but the mind of our great Lord is fearless and undisturbed. "He will not fail nor be discouraged." The child cries because the ship rolls, but his father at the helm smiles at the storm; and what a mercy it is for the child that father can smile, for if the captain were weak where would the vessel be? If the father's heart failed him, where would his boy look for comfort? Calm face of Jesus, we look up to thee, and we are quieted!

The Master wishing to comfort his servants bade them consider what they already knew, and review what they had already seen. Usually the eyes of the Christian should be directed forward: it is foolish to try to live on past experience: it is a very dangerous, if not a fatal habit, to judge ourselves to be safe because of something that we felt or did twenty years ago. Yet, for all that, we may look back, to gain practical lessons for times of service, and comfortable lessons for hours of trial. Like the archer, we may draw the string back that it may shoot the arrow onward with greater force.

The Master asks his followers whether they had used their eyes. "Having eyes, see ye not?" They had seen two wonderful miracles, by which thousands of persons had been fed; had they really seen them? Had they been satisfied just to look at the bread and the fish, and at the feasting multitude, and then to let the whole scene melt away from them? Had they really heard the voice of what the Lord had done? "Having ears, hear ye not?" Had they missed the message altogether? Then he adds, "Perceive ye not yet, neither understand?" Do you not know what my action meant when I multiplied the loaves? Do you not see how it reveals my all-sufficiency? Have you not spelt between the lines this word,—that God feedeth all things—that he openeth his hand, and supplieth the want of every living thing? Have you not yet discovered by those two miracles that there is nothing impossible with your Lord?

May we not also have missed our Lord's meanings full often? May we not have walked through a palace of wonders without observing the gleams of glory, the flashes of light eternal? Our unbelief is the undeniable evidence that we have not learned all that we ought to have done, for the outcome of spiritually seeing, perceiving, and understanding is faith. He that believeth little hath learned little; he that doubteth, and is troubled, is but a babe, needing still to learn the rudiments of holy scholarship?

The Lord further asks them that tender question, "And do ye not remember?" Brethren, we remember much that we ought to forget, and we forget much that we ought to remember. Down the stream of memory floats draff from the city of Sodom, and we diligently gather it; but down the same stream descends costly timber from Lebanon, and we suffer it to drift by us. Our sieve holds the chaff, and rejects the corn. It ought not so to be. Let us look back upon the whole of our past lives at this hour with a careful, leisurely glance, and see whether there is not enough in our diaries to condemn our doubts and bury our cares, or at least to shut up our anxieties in a cage made of the golden bars of past mercy, and fastened in with jewelled bolts of gratitude. "The Lord hath been mindful of us; he will bless us." Let us glory in what the Lord is going to do, and magnify his name for his mercy which is yet to be revealed. Let each one of us sing with David, "I will go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, I will praise thee, O God, my God." Then has memory performed her part aright when from the altars of the past she has snatched a living coal with which to set on fire the incense of to-day.

Not being able to read your own personal diaries, for these are only known to yourselves, I shall endeavour to take you back to the records of the disciples' memories, and we will think of the text as it brings

before us the two great miracles of feeding the hungry. May we learn therefrom what the Spirit designs to teach us by them.

I. And the first thing I shall want to bring to your recollection is THE DARING PROJECT, YET UNAVOIDABLE. This was the daring project —to feed five thousand persons in the wilderness. Two hundred pennyworth was the calculation of one of the ready-reckoners of the hour. Some men are always very ready at counting the pennies which they have not got. Whenever there is a holy deed to be done, our mathematical-minded unbelievers are prompt with their estimates of cost, and their prudent forecastings of grave deficiencies. We are great at calculations when we are little at believing. How can the needful amount be raised? It is so much a head among so many members. Unfortunately the heads do not yield the poll-tax, and the money does not come, and confidence in man leaves us weeping by the broken cistern. This is the way in which a large part of the church's thought boils up, evaporates, and is wasted. Alas, for those calculations about pennyworths! Or else it is, "From whence can we satisfy these men with bread here in the wilderness?" "From whence?" as if there could be any "whence" but one. Whence comes everything by which man lives? Comes it not from God? It goes round about in different channels, but it knows only one source. When any of the channels fail, the fountain is still flowing; and he that has faith to go to it directly shall not want. But it did seem to the disciples a very preposterous idea that with nothing but sand, and stone, and rock round about them, they should make a banquet for five thousand men. Is it not much more preposterous that the Christian church should have to evangelize such a city as London? It may not seem so to you; but if you lived in the midst of the extreme poverty of the East End, you would think it the problem of problems, how to reach the sunken multitudes. We little dream on what a volcano we live. The pent-up misery and the seething sin of London may yet produce a second edition of the French Revolution unless the grace of God shall interpose. The people are famishing bodily, mentally, morally, spiritually; and we must feed them. I marvel not if in the presence of these dying millions you cry—"From whence?" But then London is only one out of many cities. Our whole nation is a small fraction of the myriads of our race. China, India, Africa, are yet to be fed. The command is, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." The proposal is that the knowledge of the Lord shall yet cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, and I repeat the key-note which I sounded just now—it is a daring project: startling to the thoughtful, impossible to the calculating, hard even to the believing.

But then, you see, in the case of the disciples in the wilderness it was an inevitable project. However strange the proposition might seem, it pressed upon them; they could not avoid it, for the people had no victuals with them, and were fainting. Many of them had come from far. If they attempted to seek their own homes without refreshment they would die by the way, and therefore it would not do to send the multitude away. They must be fed. "How is it to be done?" is the question, and whether they can answer it or not, the necessity is there all the same.

With the Saviour it was an unavoidable necessity. *It would break his heart to see them fainting and famishing.* He could not endure it. At the very thought of their destitute condition he was moved with compassion. His whole nature was stirred, convulsed, and filled with excitement at the sight of hunger, pallor, weariness, and faintness. The great Shepherd *must* feed these hungry sheep. It is not with him, "Can it be done?" or "Can it not be done?" but it *must* be done. One of the imperial necessities which sometimes took possession of the royal heart of Christ had entered into his soul, and "he must needs" do its bidding. Himself took their infirmities and carried their sorrows. He was such an all-comprehending man that he included them within his own manhood. If they hungered, he hungered; if they fainted, he fainted; and if they died, he himself seemed to die; and, therefore, by the intense sympathy of his nature he was driven to feel that the multitude must be fed.

Just imagine that they had not been fed,—that they had begun to faint and die of hunger all over those hills to which they had followed Jesus, *how it would have marred his ministry!* Why, surely, the disciples who had said somewhat cavalierly, "Send the multitude away," would have been oppressed with a lifelong sorrow if their wish had been carried out. They never would have forgotten that dreadful dreary day, and the starvation, and the fainting, and the death which followed it. Think of what mischief it would have done to Christ's cause. The rumour that he led the people into solitary places, and that there they died of hunger, would have been greatly derogatory to our Lord; for what prophet ever did this? What capital the Pharisees would have made of it! How exultingly they would have cried, "Is this man after all a prophet like to Moses, who fed the people with manna in the wilderness?" They would have cried, "He said that he was the Son of God; he claimed to have raised the dead; but if he had really possessed this power he would have fed the hungry multitude who had spent their strength in following him." No, the Christ cannot have it so. He has come to save men's lives: he cannot let them die. He must feed the crowd.

Now, imagine, men and brethren, that we never carry out the commission which Christ has laid upon us to-day, that of teaching the multitude,—imagine that henceforth we never labour to win souls,—that we give up London as a forlorn case,—that we abandon the heathen world as assuredly given over to destruction, like a vessel driven by a hurricane upon an ironbound coast,—imagine it, I say. Can you endure the imagination? I cannot abandon the drifting barque. Let us man the life-boat! I know that some quiet themselves into a kind of despair as to the possibility of the Lord Jehovah ever being King over this whole earth: will you try the wretched experiment? So these people must be left to die, for how can so many be fed? But the project of love shall be executed: to that hope we cling, and to that end would we spend and be spent. If things look not so, and Christianity occupies as yet but a mere corner of the world, it matters not to our faith; we believe still. Faith counts no odds. One man with God on his side is in the majority if never another thinks as he does; therefore, in feebleness of numbers we are yet omnipotent in the might of the Most High.

Had not the multitude been fed, *our Lord would have missed a grand occasion for the display of his grace.* Grace is sovereign, but it is abounding: wherever it finds meet occasion it displays its power. A hungering, fainting crowd! What space for compassion! What vantage-ground for benevolence! It could not be that the Lord of love should let such an opportunity slip by: his love was too eager to display itself to lie quiet at such an hour. But, brethren, what an occasion for revealing the splendour of divine grace does the present age present! London is a brave canvas on which to paint a master-picture of mercy, of power, of wisdom. What a block of marble the great world presents for the Infinite sculptor! What a monument of grace will the human race become when it shall rejoice in God the Saviour! I am persuaded that the Lord has permitted the present sorrow that he may produce from it a greater glory. I am sure in my own soul that he suffers the multitudes to hunger in this terrible wilderness simply and only that he may feed them, and thus prove to all the universe his power to bless.

I hope I have brought before your minds very clearly that amazing project, which seemed most daring, and even preposterous, and yet was needful, and even inevitable.

II. Brethren, hoping for the help of God's good Spirit, I would take you, secondly, to another sight: THE BAFFLED DISCIPLES AND THEIR SERENE MASTER.

The Master has consulted Philip about supplies, in order that the difficulty of the case, and the insufficiency of mere means, might be seen of all. Philip found that all that was available was a lad's breakfast of five barley cakes and a few small fishes; and he anxiously added, "What are they among so many?" The prudent counsellor had done his best, but it did not come to much. He left this problem unsolved, "What are they among so many?" As for the rest of the disciples, they looked in Jesus's face with astonishment and blank despair, and said, "Whence should we have so much bread in the wilderness as to fill so great a multitude?" But all the time that they were thus full of fidgets and worries, there stood the Master, calm as a sweet summer's evening, not in the least disturbed or troubled. What a difference between the feebleness and unbelief of the disciples and the mighty confidence of the Lord Jesus! How much need that we be changed from glory to glory as by the image of the Lord; for we also are very far as yet from being like to him in our tone and spirit! We have not yet entered fully into his rest, nor shall we till we learn his faith in God.

Why was Jesus Christ, our Master, so calm? I have upon my mind the savour of a word the Lord once gave me for you upon that text, "Jesus knew what he would do."* It is in great part our ignorance which puts us into such a quandary. We do not know what is going to be done; we are in suspense; and suspense eats into the soul as an acid eats into metal. "From whence? How? When? Where?"—all these questions prick us like so many daggers, and each prick kills a joy. "Our thoughts are all a case of knives," as George Herbert puts it, and every knife in that case destroys a hope. But the Master had no suspense: he knew what he would do. We shall get

* See No. 1,605, "Jesus knew what he would do."

peace, brethren, when we also know what we shall do. "Oh," say you, "I thought you were going to say when we know what HE will do." Oh, no! We probably shall not know that till he does it. It is enough for us to know what *we* shall do. "But," says one, "that is what we do *not* know." I answer,—that is what we ought to know. We ought to know that we mean to leave everything with our Lord. If we once settled it in our minds that we would trust and not be afraid, what peace we should enjoy! If we will leave God's work with God, and simply trust, we shall drink into the peace of God.

Besides that, our Lord was thus calm because *he had faith, while they had nothing better than mere sense.* Here they were, as I have said before, counting the loaves and numbering the fishes. Hear them saying, "Here are only five loaves, and they are of barley; and the fish are not only few, but small." They took care to record that fact, and to lay stress upon it; and they are equally clear as to the greatness of the hungry multitude, and the barrenness of the wilderness around them. They are all going on in that style, judging by the sight of the eyes, and the touch of the hands; but the Son of God has another and better sense, he trusts his Father. Jesus, a man like themselves, has confidence that in the hour of his need the Godhead will not fail him, but will fulfil his needs. We have no Godhead in unity with our humanity; but yet we have more than Jesus had. "Oh," you say, "that cannot be!" You will admit my statement when I remind you that we have all that Christ had, and then we have Christ himself in addition. He has given us all that he has; so we have that; and then he has given us himself, so we possess the double. We ought never to doubt, but to rely upon the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—in every time of our necessity. "In the mount it shall be seen"; Jehovah-jireh: the Lord will provide. Oh, for grace to cast all care away; to be baffled and worried no longer, but to rest and be still!

Moreover, one thing, I think, which made Christ so calm was that *he really acted while they only questioned.* He said, "How many loaves have ye? Bring them hither to me." He came at once to practical action. The people who do not believe in conversions are those who never convert anybody; but as soon as ever a man is led of the Spirit to turn men from darkness to light, and God blesses him in his work, he believes in it. He that has something to do has less temptation to doubt than the man who has nothing else to do but to doubt. Heresies in the Christian church come never from the city missionary, never from the faithful pastor, never from the intense evangelist; but always from gentlemen at ease, who take no actual part in our holy war. Those literary fops who criticise religion in reviews, and have nothing else to do except to put their hands to their heads, and press whimsies out of their brows, these are the men that trouble us. Our Lord Jesus Christ gave way to no sort of doubt, for he speedily took the bread and the fish in his hands, and began blessing and breaking them, while prompt upon his own action followed the divine energy which multiplied the little store. If you and I would but serve the Lord in earnest, we might end our calculations as to how much is to be done, and how it is to be done, and where it is to be done, and all that. Get to your work, my brother, and your doubts shall fly like chaff before the wind.

The baffled disciples, and the calm and quiet Master, make up an instructive picture: we shall have profited by it to the full if we also become calmly reliant upon God, and are no more carried away with unbelieving amazement.

III. Thirdly, and briefly, I want to set two more matters before your mind's eye for your comfort. In the miracles whereby we see the multitudes fed we see MEANS USED, BUT CHRIST CONSPICUOUS.

You perceive that our Lord says of the loaves, "Bring them to me." *The means were used.* When he has multiplied these very loaves and fishes, he gives them to the men that are round about him, and of these the multitudes partake. Whatever men in their folly may talk as to neglecting the outward means, and sitting still and doing nothing, because God will do his own work, we hear nothing of the kind from Jesus. He used the loaves, and he used the fishes, and he used the men, though he could well enough have done without them. He was omnipotent, and did not want them; but he was wise, and he would teach us the lesson that by instrumentality God's great work is to be done. Therefore, despise not means, and at the same time do not rest in them.

But observe how the fish, and the loaves, and the men, and all the *means were made to sink.* In that picture you see the great crowd: I do not think the painter needs to lay his colours on very vividly; he can draw the people as a kind of luminous haze if he likes. The one figure that stands out like the sun at noonday, hiding all else by the brilliance of his light, is the Master himself. Jesus only is glorious in that out-of-doors banqueting-room. Where are those few fishes? "Here," says one. "Here," cries another. "Here," shouts another. But those few and little fishes cannot be in the hands of all those five thousand. Where has the bread gone to? "I have a loaf," cries one, "I have a loaf," says another, and they are all feeding as voraciously as they can. What has become of the original five loaves? Bring them hither, brother: at least go and make a diligent search for the original five loaves, and those little fishes, that we may preserve one of them as a relic. What, can you not find one of them? You do not know where they are. They are all gone. Of course they are. Whenever God blesses a man very greatly, that man sinks to nothing in his own esteem. If Peter's boat is full Peter's boat sinks. If we are plunged in blessing up to the hilt self is hidden under the weight of mercy. A little blessing, fancied and imagined to be something extraordinary, elevates the little man; but a great all-swamping blessing comes like a torrent, and bears the man and his littleness away, and nothing is seen but the Lord and the blessing. I am sure that it is so when the Lord uses any one of us as the means of doing good to others; we are humbled, and he is exalted.

And after the miracle is over, when they go round to gather up the fragments in their twelve baskets or seven baskets, Peter has a quick eye, but ask him whether he can find one of those original loaves. He may go from basket to basket, and he cannot find one. It is lost in the creation which God has made out of it. And can he find in all those baskets the original fishes? They must be there, for it is out of those fish that all the meat came to feed the people; but you cannot discover

them. So it shall be if God will bless us, my brethren. People will gather about us, and say, "What is there in this man? We perceive no superlative talent. What is there in this woman to make her so useful? We see nothing special about her." Never you mind. Let them pick at any bit of fish which they think they can see in your native talent or vigorous character; but as for yourself, you know that if any of the multitude are fed, the provision came from the Master's hand, when he took your little, and blest and brake and multiplied it so as to make it suffice for the occasion. I believe that *means are honoured by Christ's using them*, but I am quite sure that ere he has done with them the means will sink into the uttermost obscurity, and Jesus Christ will be all in all; and that not because the means are unblest, but because they are blest in so gracious a degree.

IV. Furthermore, we see in the miracles of feeding WORK ACCOMPLISHED OF A MARVELLOUS KIND, BUT POWER UNEXHAUSTED. See those five thousand men, and the women and the children! *They are all fed.* It is a proverb that there never was a feast yet from which some one did not go away unsatisfied; but there is no rule without an exception. Here are two exceptions to that proverb. "They did all eat, and were filled," upon two occasions. It did not matter how many thousands there were, not one of them was overlooked by the ever-blessed Host. It did not matter how hungry they were, they all ate till they were full.

But this is the point I want to show you: *the power that multiplied the bread and fish, and fed the thousands, had not come to an end.* Their power to eat was exhausted, but not Christ's power to feed; for when they had received to their utmost capacity, there was yet more to follow. The people were sharp set that day, the mountain air made their appetites keen, and their long fasting put a razor-edge upon them; yet when they had all eaten to the full, great baskets were brought, and these were filled; in the one case twelve, and in the other seven of them. There is enough for each, enough for all, and still enough remaining for future needs. The infinite Worker reveals his infinity by his unstinted bounty, his unmeasured liberality.

I cannot understand from the Greek what the size of these baskets may have been; the second set, the seven, have a name which shows that they were tolerably large, for Paul was let down in such a basket from the window when he escaped from his enemies in Damascus. The first sort which were used when there were twelve of them appear to me to have been larger still. They give you an idea of a coffin, or a coffer. They were large baskets of which it is said that men could sleep in them. Yet these baskets, whatever their size may have been, were filled—twelve and seven; and if the Lord had willed so to do, he could have filled twelve thousand baskets, or seventy thousand baskets. His power was running over; it could not be contained in earthly vessels, any more than a river can be held in a flagon. It was still flowing in a copious stream when every mouth and every basket had been filled. Some seem to fancy that the Lord does everything by the inch and the ounce, keeping to stint and quantity; but this is rather the manner of men than the fashion of the Lord. We know that the Lord Jesus Christ redeemed his elect from among

men; hence, some will have it that the merit of his atonement must be limited. No such thing. "He gave himself for us," and there can be no measure to the value of such a gift. "He died for our sins," and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world. His object was definite, but he achieved it by an agency which cannot be limited. He not only did that which he mainly aimed at, but he did more; just as in this case he not only fed the thousands, but filled baskets with the fragments. The power of God, and the merit of the sacrifice of Christ, are among the infinite things; let us bow before the Lord, and rejoice in that which surpasses measure.

Moreover, brothers and sisters, whatever the Lord has given to you, he has still far more to bestow upon you. Whatever you may feast upon in this public service, there is yet a portion for you to take home with you in the basket, and lay up in the store. However God may have blessed you in your work for him in the past, he is yet able to do exceeding abundantly above all that you ask or even think. However much the church may have been increased by a true revival, God has never yet done according to the fulness of his ability in the church as yet: even Pentecost was but the firstfruits. I hear a voice from heaven, saying, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." "And greater things than these shall ye do, because I go unto the Father." We have been far from reaching the *Ultima Thule* of sacred possibility. Still "the arrow is beyond thee." We have never seen the best of our God as yet. We may go forward with the supreme faith that Pentecost has yet to be outdone,—that all the mighty preachings of the fathers, when they turned nations to Christ, shall yet be exceeded in the triumphs of the cross in the latter days. We are approaching nobler ages, and God's great acts will not dwindle into trifles. Remember, that all that you could see, and all that you could know, would be but a minute portion of his glorious power. All that you could apprehend would only be a manifestation of the skirts of his garment. What omnipotence is, and especially what it is in the kingdom of grace, none knoweth saving God himself. Let us not limit the Holy One, nor bound the Infinite. In our Father's house there is bread enough and to spare, even after millions have been satisfied from his supplies.

V. I am going to finish by observing that THE DETAILS OF THESE MIRACLES WERE DIFFERENT, BUT THEY WERE EQUALLY INSTRUCTIVE. Kindly listen to what I am now saying, not as to anything of remarkable weight, but still as to a matter of interest in which there may be more instruction than at first sight appears.

Concerning our Lord's great free dinners, remark, first, that *the remainder after the feast was greater than the stock when the banquet began.* They began with five loaves and two fishes, they began on another occasion with seven loaves and a few fishes; but they left off with twelve baskets full in the one case, and with seven baskets full in the other. Never was this done at any of your tables, I am sure, when your children have gathered for their meals. They did all eat and were filled, and yet there was more left than when they began. This seems impossible, and yet it is the rule in the kingdom of grace. I have often found when I have come with a very small stock to feed you, brethren, that I have gone away with more than I came with. You have been

refreshed, and I have been more full than when I handed out your portions to you. You have gone to the class, dear friend, and felt that you were scantily supplied for feeding your dear ones; but you have given them your all, and under the divine blessing there has been enough for the class, and a double portion for you. You went out with five loaves, and you came back with twelve baskets heaped up. Strange! We may so give for God as to get in the giving, so spend as to increase in the spending, so die for God as to live more than ever. If this be fact, what a wide field it opens to our hope; and how it banishes our fear! It shuts the door of the counting-house where we calculate according to human reason, and it opens the doors of the treasury whence we may draw ever-growing supplies. Go, brother, and scatter your handful of seed, for you shall come again rejoicing, bringing sheaves with you! Give of your meal and oil to the Lord's servant, and your barrel and cruse shall be replenished in the giving. Remember Bunyan's rhyme is true spiritually as well as providentially.

> "There was a man and some did count him mad,
> The more he gave away the more he had."

Next learn that *care is always taken by Christ of all the broken pieces.* The Lord All-sufficient is yet the God of economy. Since Jesus could create as much food as ever he pleased, you might have thought that it was hardly worth his while to gather up the fragments; and yet he did so. Waste is of Satan, not of God. God is not lavish of creation, nor prodigal of miracles. Though the Lord can raise up in this place, if he pleases, fifty ministers in an instant, he may not do so; but what he would have us do is to make use of such powers as we have. If we are only fragments our place is not the ground, but the basket. We must not allow ourselves to be thrown away, or to be consumed by an animal passion, or to be left to decay; but we must be in the Lord's store, ready to be used when the time comes. We shall be of some use one of these days, if we are willing to be used. If you, my friend, are not a whole loaf, you are a crust, and no crust may be wasted. If you are not a slice of bread you are a crumb, and even crumbs are dear to hungry men. If you are not a big fish, yet you may be a little fish, and you must not waste yourself, nor must the church of God allow you to be wasted, but use must be found for you somewhere. But what a wonderful thing this is—Omnipotence picking up crumbs! God All-sufficient, to whom the cattle on a thousand hills are as nothing—who could make a whole sea of fishes, or ten thousand worlds of bread, by his bare will, and nothing else; and yet he sets his disciples to gather up broken pieces that nothing may be lost! Surely it ill becomes us to waste a penny, an hour, or an opportunity. Let us be severely economical for the Lord our God.

Notice a rather curious thing: *there was most left when there was least to begin with.* When they commenced the dinner with seven loaves they gathered up seven baskets full, but when they had only five loaves they filled twelve baskets with the fragments. I suppose the baskets to have been of the same size, for I do not discover that the second set of baskets were any larger than the first. However, from a stock of seven loaves, after all expenditure, there came seven baskets as a remainder;

but when there were only five loaves, and a greater expenditure, there were twelve baskets full left for the waiters. This is singular. The more they begin with, the less they end with; and the less they begin with, the more they have when the feast is concluded. Yet I have often noticed that this does occur. Have not you? When you and I have begun rather grandly, and God has blessed us, we have had great reason to thank him; but when we have begun very feebly, he has frequently blessed us far more, and we have ended by praising him upon the high-sounding cymbals. We have gone away wondering,—"Five loaves and twelve baskets! Why, the other day, when I had seven loaves, I had only seven baskets!" Yes, let the rich rejoice when he is brought low, for he, like Job, shall be richer than before. Do not begin to sink in spirit because you seem to have declined in ability; but just be confident in God that in your case also there will be most reward at the end when there was least capital to work with.

Note again that *there was less visible means when there was more done.* There were only five loaves, but they fed five thousand: when there were seven loaves they fed only four thousand. The most was done when there was the least to do it with. And so it shall happen to you, O worker for Jesus; for the more God blesses you, the less you shall see of any adequate reason in yourself why you should be blest. With your five loaves you shall feed your five thousand, whilst somebody who had seven shall do less than you.

Another curious thing is that *when there was most eaten there was most left.* When five thousand besides women and children ate as much as ever they could, they left more than the four thousand did. The smaller number could not eat so much as the greater, yet their residuum of food uneaten was less than when five thousand filled themselves to the full. It is a curious inversion of all our regulations. We suppose the larger our company, the less will remain; but here it seems that when the company was largest then that which was left was largest; and when the company was fewer then less was left. It is so with us: the more we have to draw from us spiritually the more will remain for our own portion. We shall make no saving by reducing the number of those whom we serve, but the reverse.

One other thing also learn, and that is that *where there is the most work for Jesus there will be the most remuneration.* It is not so elsewhere, for men are often paid best for doing least; but in our Lord's case every man's reward shall be according to his service. Those who waited on the vast crowd of people could not get much to eat themselves during the meal, for they were fully occupied in handing the bread to others; but when all was over the Master said to them, "So you have had a great company to-day, there were five thousand at the least. You must need refreshment yourselves; yonder are twelve baskets full of that which remaineth over, divide them among yourselves." Another day their work was hard, but not quite so laborious. That extra thousand, that always brings in the excessive labour through overcrowding, had not been there, and they had supplied four thousand pretty pleasantly. Then it was that they received only seven baskets for their share: a liberal allowance, but still not so large as on the former occasion. If you will work for Christ, and give for Christ, and labour

for Christ, you shall have a rich return of present joy from him; and this shall have a proportion in it. Many people will always be poor because they never give to the cause of God. Poor people should give in order that they may not be poor any longer, and the rich should give that they may not become poor. I mean not that these are to be the chief motives, but they may have their place. You that have little ability should work hard with that little ability that you may increase it; and you that have great ability of course should do so, because you have so many talents entrusted to you. The Lord will allow no service to remain unrecompensed; and work done for the poor and needy shall win its wage, not of debt, but of grace. Satan said, "Doth Job serve God for nought?" Suppose he had done so: the devil would have gone his way, and said that God was a hard master, whose service brought no sort of reward with it. Either way, Satan would have made mischief, and as we have no wish to please him, we admit that we do not serve God for nought, but that in keeping his commandments there is great reward. When the multitude have done feasting, your Master will let you sit down to meat, and you shall have abundant joy with him.

The chief point for all of us is to get at the blessed work. In the name of the ever-living God, let us feed each one his man that is nearest to him till the whole company shall be fed; for the Christ is behind us, the Son of God is working with us; and the bread is not our bread but his bread; and the feeding of the multitude is not our work, but his; and the power is not ours, but all his own, and to his name shall be all the glory. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark vi. 34—44; viii. 1—21.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—46, 685, 35.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Revising this sermon reminds me of our happy Thursday evening gatherings. May I soon have the joy of ministering among you again, and marking your numerous attendances at the week-night services! May these ever be to us the happy evidences of the spiritual life of the church!

I have now been here for a week, and the sunshine and warmth are doing wonders for me. We are smitten down on a sudden, but we recover our lost strength slowly, and therefore I am still weak; but the pain is gone, and I can walk a little, for which I am joyfully grateful.

My heart is with the work at home. I am glad to hear that the Elders propose special services. Give them your utmost aid. Will any one member of the church hold back? Surely each one will be eager to make up for my lack of service by his own personal endeavour. I pray my Lord and God to send prosperity to this effort. By the love of Jesus, I plead with him to stir you all up, and through you to save sinners.

With all my heart, your loving minister,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, February 7th, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

PETER'S BLUNDER: A LESSON TO OURSELVES.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, FEBRUARY 22ND, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON JULY 3RD, 1884.

"But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean."—Acts x. 14.

"NOT so, Lord." This is a very curious expression. I do not mind how you turn it into English from the original, but it is a very strange compound. If Peter had said, "Not so," there would have been a clear consistency in his language and tone. But "Not so, *Lord*," is an odd jumble of self-will and reverence, of pride and humility, of contradiction and devotion. Surely, when you say, "Not so," it ought not to be said to the Lord; and if you say, "Lord," you ought not to put side by side with such an ascription the expression, "Not so." Peter always was a blunderer in his early days, and he had not grown out of his old habits of honest impetuosity. He meant well, and his expression was not intended to convey all that we might easily make of it. At any rate, it is not for us to condemn him. Who are we that we should sit in judgment on a saint of God? Besides, we are not without fault ourselves in the matter of incorrect speech. You and I have said some very curious compound things in our time. We have uttered exclamations that have been so good that the Lord accepted them: but they have been so bad that he could not have accepted them if it had not been for his infinite mercy. In our utterances there has been faith mixed with unbelief, love defaced with a want of submission, gratitude combined with distrust, humility flavoured with self-conceit, courage undermined with cowardice, fervour mingled with indifference. We are as strange beings as the image which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream; and our speech betrays the fact. When we were fashioned by nature first of all we were "fearfully and wonderfully made"; but when we fell, and were unmade by sin, we became monstrosities, combinations of contrarieties. I will not dwell upon that topic, but every man who looks within, if the candle of God be shining within him, must often cry out, "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou

visitest him?" In our speech this mixed estate of ours most plainly shows itself. We often feel as if we could eat our words, or at the least unsay them. Speeches that have had about them real sincerity and true devotion have been greatly marred by expressions which were not fit for the occasion. Our tongues need a sevenfold sanctification if we are always to speak that which is good and acceptable; and, surely, that is what we desire.

Now, we will have a look at Peter, and see what we can learn from this singular expression of his—this strangely compounded exclamation, "Not so, Lord."

I. The first truth which we may easily learn is that THE OLD MAN REMAINS IN THE CHRISTIAN MAN. Albeit we are made new creatures in Christ Jesus, and the life that is within us, the dominant life, is new, and holy, and heavenly, yet the old nature still survives. Though crucified, it is long in dying, and struggles hard. Sin dwelleth in us, so that we painfully discover that, though we are new men, we are yet men; and though the grace of God reigns within us, yet there is a struggle for the kingdom, and the sin that dwells in us strives after the mastery. We are renewed sinners, but we are sinners still. Our hearts and hands are cleansed by divine grace, but they have a sad tendency to become defiled.

Peter was Peter still. Why, dear friends, I think that if I had never before seen this passage in the Acts, but had read Peter's life as I find it in the writings of the four evangelists, and somebody had newly shown me the present text, and said, "I have left out the name of the apostle, but one of them, when he had seen a vision from God, and knew that God spoke to him, nevertheless said, 'Not so, Lord,'—what apostle was that?" I should not have had to guess twice, I am sure. I should have been sure that it was Peter; so you see Peter is Peter after the grace of God has renewed him. I think we must say the same of ourselves. You, Thomas, who used to be so thoughtful and careful, and somewhat particular and nervous, you are a child of God, but you are Thomas still; and I suspect that you will be wanting to put your finger into the print of the nails, and to thrust your hand into his side, or else you will not believe. And you, John—you always were very loving and hearty, and at the same time hot in your zeal; and now that you have become a disciple of Christ, I am sure that you will be more loving than ever; but I should not wonder if even now you should be heard saying, "Master, send fire upon those who reject thee, and destroy them." The man is still the same man: he is greatly altered, but he has not lost his identity. Whatever change has taken place in him, Peter is Peter, and I should like you young converts to recollect *that;* for perhaps you think that in the day when you were converted you lost your old selves altogether. I can assure you that you did not: the hasty temper, the sluggish constitution, the gloomy tendency, or the fickle humour will be there still, to be struggled with so long as you are here below. You received a new self, and a better self, but the old self is there still. Your mother will be able to recognise you, I dare say, if you live at home as a young person: she will know that it is the same John, or the same Mary, for your foibles and weaknesses will crop up, if not your faults; and, therefore, you must keep a watch upon yourself.

You are greatly changed; God has done wonders for you: he has put a new heart within you, and a new song into your mouth, but the inclination to evil is not dead: your passions, appetites, desires, are each one prone to overleap the boundary, and transgress. The best of men are men at the best. And Peter, after the Holy Ghost has fallen upon him, and he has preached a very wonderful soul-winning sermon, is, nevertheless, Peter, and you can tell that he is the selfsame person: the accent of his words still bewrays him.

Note that *Peter here shows how readily he fell, not precisely into the same sin, but into the same kind of sin.* His tendency was still to err in a certain direction. This Peter who said, "Not so, Lord," is he not the same man who in his impudence *rebuked his Master*, and said, "That be far from thee, Lord"? Impudence, I call it. It was a piece of impertinence for which he was well rebuked when the Master said, "Get thee behind me, Satan." Our Lord detected Satan endeavouring to work through the zealous enthusiasm of Peter, to tempt him to turn aside from the great work that he came to do. I do not think that the other disciples would have gone as far as Peter did: they had faults in other directions, but it remained for Peter to rebuke his Master; and now we see him half rebuking his Lord again as he declines to kill and eat the creatures let down from heaven. Yes, Peter actually says, "Not so, Lord." May we never be found questioning providence, or disputing with revelation, lest we be taken in the same fault, and receive a rebuke for rebuking our Lord!

Is not this the same man who at supper-time *refused his Master?* When the Lord Jesus took a towel, and girded himself, and was about to wash the disciples' feet, Peter said to him, "Dost thou wash my feet?" for he was astounded at such an example of humility. When the Master came with the basin he said, "Thou shalt never wash my feet": and then you recollect what a turn he made when his Lord said, "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Then he cried, "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head." He was always impulsive; and from this cause he rebukes his Master, and he refuses his Master. He acts as if he fancied that he knew better than his Lord, though in his heart of hearts he had no such notion. Yes, this is the same Peter who cried, "Not so, Lord." He refuses for the moment to do his Lord's bidding, for it happens to be contrary to his ideas of propriety. Oh, that we may be kept clear of this grave fault!

And this is he who *flatly contradicted his Master* on another occasion. When Jesus said to his disciples, "All ye shall be offended because of me," then Peter said, "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." His Lord had told him that he would deny him, and yet he declared he should not. I know all the excuses that we make for Peter, and I am quite prepared to make them; but, at the same time, that was the way of Peter; that is the part in which he was weak. He did this in his earlier days, but after the Holy Ghost had come upon him, and he had been baptized into his power, and had risen into quite a superior condition from that in which he was in the life of our Lord on earth, yet he still tripped in the same place where he used to fall; and he said, "Not so, Lord," as if he would again rebuke, refuse, and contradict his Lord.

I therefore put it again. What were your faults before conversion? Guard against them now. What have been your failures, and your weaknesses, and your errors since you have been converted? Watch against them still; for if you have now become an experienced Christian, and your graces have been greatly developed, and you have become exceedingly useful in the church of God, yet, beloved brother, the points in which there is a weakness in your natural constitution, and in which you have made failures, are the points at which you must set a double guard; watching and praying lest you be led into temptation by those special features of your character. Kindly notice this earnest advice, which my loving anxiety leads me to press upon you. I have seen so much of the fruits of presumption that I entreat you not to give way to it. If anybody tells you that the old man is quite dead, you may say, "Nobody but the old devil could have set you on to whisper such a lie in my ear. The truth is not in you." You and I know that inbred sin is our daily plague, a fact past all question with our souls. We have not to go many steps on our journey before we painfully feel that the sins which we thought we had subdued, and should never be subject to any more, suddenly arouse themselves out of their graves, and fight with us as if they had never been conquered before. If we did not cry to God with tears and agony for hourly upholding, we should find ourselves falling into the same ditches into which we fell years ago. My venerable friend, that point in which you feel that you are quite safe is the place where you lie most open to attack. Mark my words, and see if they be not verified. Where you say to yourself, "I am past danger on that account," there the enemy will get an advantage over you. "But I am strong," say you. Nonsense, you are weak as water. You dream of perfection, but you are a mass of wants, and infirmities, and conceits; and if it were not for the infinite mercy of God, who deals tenderly with you, you would soon have most painfully to know it to your own dishonour, and to the grief of your brethren round about you. Peter is Peter still, notwithstanding what grace has done.

You notice about Peter this thing still remaining, that *he blurts out what he feels.* Be it for bad or good, prompt deliverance of his mind is still the characteristic of Peter. He has seen the vision, and he has heard the voice of God saying to him, "Rise, Peter, kill and eat"; and without a minute's deliberation Peter replies, "Not so, Lord." That was how he did before. He was always blundering because he was in such a hurry. If he had put his finger to his forehead for half a minute, he would not have said many things which he did say. This was a man whose wisdom always lay at the back of his head, instead of at the front of it. It came in to tell him that he had made a mistake, but it never came to hand soon enough to prevent the error; and Peter after Pentecost had not lost this trait of his character. I may be addressing young folk here who are very impulsive, and speak all in a hurry things which they afterwards are sorry for. I should not wonder if you continue to be impulsive when you grow older. Perhaps it will be one of your snares through life. Be on your guard against it. It is a strength if it be rightly managed. Give me the man who in a good cause does not think twice, but acts upon the warm impulses of a ready mind. Give me the man who understands that second thoughts are not always

the best, for they are apt to chill, and the best thought is that which comes from a heart fired with the love of Christ. The best Christian workers to lead the van, to make a dash with a forlorn hope, have been those brave, impulsive, Peter-like spirits; but that same characteristic, if not kept in proper order by the Spirit of God, may lead you into a world of mischief. You say your say so quickly, but you cannot unsay it, even in years and ages. You cannot call back the words which now cause you to bite your tongue with regret. You did grow very angry. It is true that ten minutes calmed you, and you were as sorry as possible for all your bitter speeches; but that could not undo the injury, nor heal the cruel wound that you had given to your faithful friend. You must cry to God that, if you are impulsive, the impulses may always come from him; and you must ask him daily to lead and guide you in the way of understanding. I pray that you may not often pull out your sword, and cut off a man's ear, for Jesus is not here to work miracles, as he was at hand fortunately with Peter; and you may cut somebody's ear off, and not be able to put it on again. Ask him to keep you in check, that you may not be working mischief in your haste which you will have to repent of in your leisure.

But Peter is Peter still, and so does the renewed man betray the infirmities which were with him before his renewal. Yet *Peter as Peter still has good points*, for he owns all this. Luke could not have recorded this incident in the Acts of the Apostles unless Peter had personally told him, for none else knew of it; and in the next chapter we find that, when Peter was brought up before the other apostles for what he had done, he narrated the whole affair, and confessed, "But I said, 'Not so, Lord.'" You see he was always outspoken, honest, and clear as the day. There was a trace of dissimulation in him once, but I should think that it was strange work with him. As a general rule, the bluff fisherman spoke what first came to hand, and had no cunning about him. In this let us be at one with him. If you carry that trait of character with you into the things of grace, so much the better, for there is no Christian that is so little a Christian as the man who is great at tricks, and mighty at "prudence." I think that is the name folks often give it. "Cunning," I call it. The man who blurts out his mind so that you know what he thinks may get himself into lots of trouble, but he does not get so many other people into trouble as the double-minded man would do; and by the grace of God it often happens that his directness, sincerity, and truthfulness work together to effect a great blessing in the midst of his brethren. May the Spirit of God sanctify our peculiarities, that they may make us specially useful; but save us from our constitutional infirmities, that we may not by them be led into sin!

There is the first head: the old man still remains in the regenerate man. It was apparent in Peter, and it is evident enough in us.

II. But now, secondly, THE OLD MAN GENERALLY FIGHTS AGAINST GOSPEL PRINCIPLES; for this was the point upon which Peter differed from his Lord. This "Not so, Lord," applied to grand gospel principles which had been put before him, as for instance, *the abolition of the ceremonial law*. Peter was to know that those ceremonial laws, which forbade the eating of this and that, were now to be abrogated. By Christ's

coming here on earth, and bearing a mortal body about with him, he has taken away the ban from all forbidden meats, so far as they were forbidden upon religious grounds. God has cleansed them, and what God has cleansed Peter was not to call common. Peter at the first revolted from this: "I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. Not so, Lord; not so. I cannot arise, and kill, and eat." Many to this day quarrel with God's glorious gospel on ceremonial grounds. The Scripture saith that men are to be saved by faith; but these formalists say, "Surely, they must be regenerated in baptism; they must be further fed by the blessed Eucharist." Persons who are evangelical in their hearts, and who unwittingly preach the gospel, nevertheless muddle it up with a number of outward ordinances; and thus they say practically, "Not so, Lord." Ritualism is practically battling against that gospel which lies in faith in Christ, and not in ceremonies; which demands spiritual life, and not external performances. All of us are apt to err in this manner, for we incline to attach undue importance to matters which are proper and useful in their places, but which are by no means essential to salvation. One person thinks a great deal of confirmation, which is purely an ordinance of man; another thinks equally much of attending class-meeting, which is an instructive practice, but not a subject of divine command. Where Jesus has made no rule we are not to make any. We are to receive all whom Christ receives. None are unclean whom he has cleansed; none are to be set aside if he admits them to his love. Yet this lesson is not soon learned by sticklers for propriety: they question any man's salvation who follows not with them, and when bidden to commune with them, they start aside with Peter's cry in their hearts, if not on their lips, "Not so, Lord."

The same battle is carried on by certain people who have never eaten anything common or unclean, in the sense that they have never associated with any but very respectable people. Here the fight is concerning *the equality of men before the law, and under the gospel.* An evangelist brings into the congregation all the poor people of the district, and the very worst of characters gather to hear him. This ought to be a great joy, but in certain cases it is not. Many are offended, and in effect say, "'Not so, Lord.' Well, really, I—I—I do not like sitting next to one who is dressed so badly, and smells so vilely. I saw a woman of loose character come in, and I felt as if I must leave my pew." Oh, you very respectable people, you know that you get into that state of mind! You do not say much about it when *we* hear you, because you know that it would not answer your purpose; yet you squeeze up against the corner of the pew to get away from the poor and needy. Do you not? If a man with a smock-frock, or with a dirty face, comes in here, you would just as soon that he should sit on the flaps in the aisle as sit in your seat, and a great deal sooner, I dare say. There is a great deal of that kind of feeling about, and it may be very natural, but it certainly betrays feebleness of Christian love. Truly, it is an instinct of cleanliness to shrink from the unwashed; but then it is an instinct of the new life to rejoice in the salvation of souls, and for the sake of it to put up with greater discomforts than can arise from contact with the fallen. I suppose that in the days of James, when he rebuked those who beckoned the rich to sit near them, the Roman or

the Jewish pauper was quite as ill-savoured as any that are among us at this day, yet he makes no allowance for this. Let us prize the common and unclean so much that we never think of them in that light. Never let us set up the tyranny of caste, and rebuild the middle wall of partition which our Saviour died to throw down. "God hath made of one blood all nations of men": we sprang of a common parent, and for men there is but one Saviour. Let us know no partialities, but desire with equal earnestness the salvation of peer and pauper, of matron and harlot, of gentleman and vagabond. To hear some people speak of their fellow-men is sickening to me: they talk of them as if they were mere offal and rubbish, not worthy of their genteel notice. I bless God that I seldom hear it, for it rouses my wrath. A minister in a certain neighbourhood used solemnly to warn his people against all such wicked persons as Moody and Sankey, and the like, because they were the means of saving the lower orders. He said, "I see people in this district professing to be saved, and yet they never before went to a place of worship at all. Therefore," he said, "I do not believe in their salvation, for surely if God were about to save a great number, he would first of all save those who have for years regularly attended our places of worship." That was a bit of Peter-like propriety coming up, and saying, "Not so, Lord." Oh, the cruelty of respectability! If you have anything of that left in your nature, ask God to turn it out. It was in the great Father's own house that there lived an elder brother, who said, "As soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." He was angry, and would not go in. He was a very excellent man indeed, a very respectable person; and he was not going in with such tag-rag as this prodigal brother of his. He did not like so much fuss made over a profligate. My friend, that proud propriety is of the old man. Whenever that disposition comes up in you it is your baser part, the part that ought to die, and in this way it shows its enmity to the gospel of the grace of God. I love to believe in the perfect equality of men in the sight of God as to the work of his grace. If they do but seek the Lord, and put their trust in him, there is no difference; and this we must all maintain, as Christian men and women, by receiving all classes with joy. Otherwise, we shall be just getting where Peter was when he said, "Not so, Lord," for he said that he had not eaten anything common or unclean; and we say that we have not associated with any person living in a back slum.

The same kind of battle takes place when our old man fights against the gospel in *its great principle of free, and sovereign grace.* You war against it yourself when you are conscious of having done wrong, and therefore doubt the grace of God. At once the old man says, "You have sinned, and therefore you are out of God's favour: he will cast you away, and you will perish." But the gospel principle is—

> "Whom once he loves he never leaves,
> But loves them to the end."

The tendency to legalism, which is natural to us, kicks against the glorious doctrine of free grace and unchanging love, and sometimes we say, "I am afraid that I am not good enough to pray, or fit to participate in the grace of God": as if God wanted some good in us before he

would bestow his grace upon us. A diseased man is fit to be healed, a poor man is fit for alms, a drowning man is fit to be rescued, a sinful man is fit to be forgiven. God would have us come to him all empty, and feeble, and sinful, and erring, and just receive of his free favour in Christ Jesus, spontaneously given on his part, without anything in us that can merit his esteem. Oh, it is a grand thing to be able to spell that word "grace—grace—grace"! Somebody said the other day that to say "free grace" was to use a redundancy. That is so; but there is such a real redundancy in grace that we do not mind using a redundancy of expression when we are talking about it. "Free grace" we mean still to say, for, as some people will not believe that grace is free, it is still necessary to make it very clear that it is so, and to say not only "grace," but "*free* grace." Christ did not die for saints, but for sinners. He came not into the world because of our righteousness, but he died for our sins. The work of God is not to save men deserving salvation, but men who are altogether undeserving of it. The great flood of divine mercy overflows and drowns all our sins, rising, and yet rising, fifty cubits upwards, till the tops of the mountains of our iniquity are all covered, never to be seen again. What a grand article of the creed is that,—"I believe in the forgiveness of sins"! Why are we so slow to believe it? Is it not our old man rising, even as it did in Peter, to give battle to free grace with its "Not so, Lord"?

III. Thirdly, and as briefly as I can, I would remind you that THE OLD NATURE SHOWS ITSELF IN MANY WAYS, always fighting against God. "Not so, Lord," is often the cry of our unregenerate part.

It is so against *the doctrine of the gospel.* Some persons do not believe the gospel because they do not want to believe it. They studiously omit to read all such parts of Scripture as would enlighten their minds. They are not convincible because they have already persuaded themselves as to what truth ought to be. "Not so, Lord," is their cry. Beloved, never get into that state of mind. Follow God's Word anywhere, believing what the Spirit says, let him teach you what he may. Whatever your notions may have been, when you come across a clear statement in the Word of God, bow your every thought to it, and accept its teaching, for it is true, whatever your thoughts may be. It is mine to believe what the Bible teaches; it is not mine to object, and cry, "Not so, Lord."

This old nature of ours sometimes cries out against God *in matters of duty.* We can do anything except the special duty of the hour, and as to that one thing, we say, "Not so, Lord." Yonder young woman knows that according to God's Word she must not marry that young man, for she would be unequally yoked together with an unbeliever. Now, she was quite willing to be baptized, and she is heartily willing to give her money to the Lord, and in fact to do anything except that one act of self-denial, which would require her to cease from a fond friendship. Yet, my friend, I do not know what sorrow you will make for yourself if you really break that salutary rule. I have seen many instances of mixed marriages, but I have had to mourn over nearly all of them as the cause of untold wretchedness. Take you the precept, and knowing that it is God's mind concerning you, never dare even for a moment to hesitate. "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." Never let your lips

say, "Not so, Lord"; for it is disobedience to demur against the command of the Lord your God.

As it is with your practice, so let it be with everything else. Our corrupt nature will dare to cavil at *processes of sanctification.* We are anxious to bear fruit, but we do not care to be pruned; we are glad to be delivered from dross, but not by the fire. Rebukes are undervalued, searching truths are avoided, faithful friends are shunned, and awakening Scriptures are neglected, for carnal ease pleads hard for indulgence, and the flesh whines, "Not so, Lord."

Even *in the dispensation of the kingdom* self-will comes in: we like not that God should bless men by a sect to which we do not belong: we are envious for our own Moses, lest the irregular Eldads and Medads should eclipse him. I have known old folks object to the Lord's blessing that rather obtrusive young woman, that very forward lad, that overzealous person. Let God bless us, certainly, but not by objectionable people! Many would prefer apostles from Athens rather than from Nazareth: they prefer the smell of study lamp-oil to that of the fishing-boats of Galilee. We pray for conversions, yet certain persons would not believe in them if they happened out of the regular way. We are too masterful by half, and are far from taking up our proper position as servants. Too much of the Peter clings to us, and our tongue is much too ready to cry out, "Not so, Lord."

Our natural corruption is apt to quarrel with the Lord concerning *our sufferings.* Against this also be ever watchful. Whenever you are called to endure trial, do not complain of the particular form it takes. Perhaps it is great bodily pain, and you say, "I could bear anything better than this." That is a mistake. God knows what is the best for his child. Do not cry, "Not so." "Oh, I could bear sickness," says another, "but I have been slandered! My character is taken away, and I cannot bear that." Thus our will asserts its place, and we pine to be our own god and ruler. This must not be. You must, my dear friend, bear that which the Lord appoints, or else you will make the matter a deal worse. If you want anything done well do it yourself, with this exception—that, if you want your character defended, you should always let that alone. Somebody else will take care of that for you, and if slander be the rod under which you are to smart, many of us have felt it before you, and you need not complain so bitterly, as if a strange thing had happened to you. Do not cry, "Not so, Lord"; but let the Lord appoint you care or calumny, sickness or slander, for he knows best.

"But I am afraid that I shall lose my wife, or a favourite child. I think that I could have suffered anything but that." Yes, you see, a rebellious spirit contends with God one way or another; it cannot be quiet. I was greatly struck with a story a dear sister told me yesterday. She was very nearly being removed from the church: she had quarrelled with the Lord for taking away her husband, and she would not go to any place of worship, she felt so angry about her loss. But her little child came to her one morning, and said, "Mother, do you think Jonah was right when he said, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death'?" She replied, "O child, do not talk to me," and put the little one away, but she felt the rebuke, and it brought her back to her God, and back to

her church again, humbly rejoicing in him who had used this instrumentality to set her right with her Lord. O friends, let us be silent before the Lord, and judge his ways no longer, for in this judgment there is no benefit to ourselves or others! Do not say, "Not so," but rather, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good." When Jacob crossed his aged hands to bless the two sons of Joseph, according to the divine will, Joseph said, "Not so, my father;" but he could not alter his father's act. Jacob guided his hands wittingly, and the blessing came as God would have it. Perhaps a great blessing is coming on you in a cross-handed manner. The patriarch had experienced many a cross-handed blessing himself, and therefore he knew what he was at.

"Cross-handed came the blessing down
On Jacob's hoary head,
When Joseph's bloody coat was shown
As numbered with the dead."

Many a wonderful blessing has come to us in that cross-handed way. Bow your head, therefore, and silence your tongue, and have done for ever with arraigning your Maker before your petty judgment-seat. Shall not the heavenly Father do that which is right and good?

Sometimes our corrupt nature quarrels with God about *our service.* The Lord says, "Go into the Sunday-school." "I should have liked to preach," says the young man. "Go into the Sunday-school." "Not so, Lord," says he, and he will not go, and thus he misses his life-work. It will not do for us to choose what work we will do. Who would employ servants who, when they are told to do this or go there, should say, "No, sir; I prefer another engagement"? They will get their money on Saturday night, with the advice to find a new master. We may well pray,

"Dismiss me not thy service, Lord,"

if we have been pickers and choosers of our work. Do what the Lord bids you, when he bids you, where he bids you, as he bids you, as long as he bids you, and do it at once. Never say, "Not so, Lord."

"But," you say, "*his providence* is very strange to me. I am called away from the place where my heart has struck its roots. God deals with me in a terrible manner." Truly his way is in the storm. Yet, never say, "Not so, Lord." It is not a pretty position for a child of God to be in to be trying to amend the arrangements of the great Father. The Omniscient knows best. You think so, do you not? Do not act as if you thought the contrary. Oh, brothers and sisters, an obedient heart, a yielding spirit, a submissive mind, and an acquiescence in the divine will, are the necessary elements of happiness; but the spirit of "Not so, Lord," is the mother of all the mists and fogs that darken our pathway. If thou wilt walk contrary to God he will walk contrary to thee. "Unto the froward he will show himself froward"; but to the humble and contrite, the submissive and obedient, he will show himself exceeding gracious. If thou wilt stoop thou shalt conquer. If thou wilt yield thou shalt have thy desire. If thou wilt be nothing God will make much of thee. If thou wilt be lowly God will exalt thee. But if thou wilt stand out against thy

Lord, as he loves thee, he will correct thee, and he will teach thee better manners ere he has done with thee.

IV. Let us leave that point, and close with a fourth observation: —IT IS A GREAT PITY WHEN THIS KIND OF WILFULNESS STANDS IN THE WAY OF USEFULNESS.

It would have been so with Peter if the Lord had not used the process by which he overcame him. "Not so, Lord," said Peter: "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." In some things Peter was a great deal *too conservative.* He says, "Not so, Lord," and some read it, "Never, Lord, never, Lord, for I have never;" that is, "I must never do a thing I have never done." Many are of this mind: they cannot advance an inch. This is the hymn they sing of a morning before breakfast, "As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen." And any time until they go to bed at night it is the tune they keep on singing, "As it was in the beginning: as it was in the beginning." They will never do what has not been done, nor learn what they have not learned. Many will only act as others act; they must keep in the fashion. Now this is a rule which I never accepted; for it always seemed to me that I was probably to do what nobody had done before me; for was I not in some points different from every one else? One likes to look about, and search for methods of usefulness which have not been tried, for a novel form of labour may be like a bit of virgin soil which will yield a better crop than our own arable lands which have been drained so long. Do you not think that Christian men are apt to be stereotyped in their ways? You must always sing so many verses and no more; you must pray a certain time, and go right round Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, before you close your petitions. Certain people must always do what they have done, even though they fall asleep in the doing of it. This kind of routine forbids enlarged usefulness, prevents our getting at out-of-the-way people, and puts a damper upon all zeal. Let us struggle against the spirit which would bind us hand and foot: where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty. Let us not say, "Never, Lord, for I have never," but, on the contrary,—"Right speedily will I attempt this work of usefulness, because I have forgotten it so long; I will make haste, and delay no longer to keep thy commandments."

Propriety hinders very many: decorum is their death. I do not know the precise meaning of it, but there are genteel people about who consider that the finest thing on earth is "propriety." Mr. Rowland Hill was said to have ridden on the back of all order and decorum. "No," he said, "I cannot ride on the back of two horses, but I have two horses to my carriage, and I have called one of them 'Order,' and the other 'Decorum,' to make the report come as nearly right as possible." Order and decorum were never put to a better use than when they drew Mr. Rowland Hill from town to town preaching the gospel; and I, for one, am glad that he never took those horses into the pulpit. He was just as disorderly and indecorous as a Christian man ought to be—that is to say, he was perfectly natural, and spoke the truth from his heart, and men that heard it felt the power of it; and so he became a blessing to this part of London, and, indeed, to the whole world. Shake yourself up a little, my brother. If you are too precise may the Lord set you on

fire, and consume your bonds of red tape! If you have become so improperly proper that you cannot commit a proper impropriety, then pray God to help you to be less proper, for there are many who will never be saved by your instrumentality while you study propriety.

Again, I doubt not that some are hindered in their usefulness by *their great dignity*. It is wonderful what noble creatures men can grow into, if they are let alone. "This great Babylon that I have built," cries Nebuchadnezzar. That is the same gentleman who afterwards ate grass like the oxen, and whose nails grew like birds' claws. We have seen very, very, very great little people, and very, very little great people who have given themselves mighty airs; but we have never seen any good come of their greatness. Few people are blessed by these gorgeous individuals. God seldom sends his Elijahs bread and meat by peacocks. If you go as visiting ladies into the houses of the poor very finely dressed, and you "condescend" to them, they will not want to see you any more; but if you go in and sit at their side, and show them that you are their true friends, you get at their hearts. Love thyself less and less, and love thy God more. Love the soul of every man with all the intensity of thy being. Struggle and agonize to bring sinners to the Saviour's feet, and God will help thee. But if thou standest on thy dignity, and sayest, "Lord, not so; for I have never eaten any thing common or unclean," it will be a serious injury to thee. I said to one of our classes, "Let *I* grow very small, and let *J* grow very great," and the brethren did not need an explanation. May we so love our Lord Jesus that we cease to care for dignity, and are willing to be nothing for his sake!

Are there any here who have not yet believed in Jesus? I hope they will trust their souls with him at once, and, when they have done so, let them come forward without delay, and confess his name, and be baptized into the sacred Three. Then let them try to grow downward lower and lower, till they sink into nothing, that Christ may be all in all.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts x. 1—33.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—23 (Song III.), 704, 708.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—May the peace of God abide with you. With great pleasure I perform the weekly duty of preparing the sermon, and I pray our Lord to make it a blessing to all my readers. Each day I gather a measure of strength. My walking is measured by steps few and slow; but then I can walk, and this is a great reason for gratitude to one who could not put his foot down without pain. I am recovering in all respects, and feel that a fortnight in this place has done more for me than could have been effected by months of medicine.

To him whom I worshipped in pain be grateful praises for restoring mercy.

Yours heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, Feb. 16, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HISTORY OF SUNDRY FOOLS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 1ST, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON JULY 17TH, 1884.

"Fools because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted. Their soul abhorreth all manner of meat; and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses. He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions."—Psalm cvii., 17—20.

THE psalm contains one picture in four panels. It illustrates a single experience in its main outlines, for in every case it is written, "Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saveth them out of their distresses"; and yet each case is very different from any one of the others. We have variety and similarity. It is just so in the case of the people of God. Our fall, our sin, our call by grace, our prayer, the Lord's answer to that prayer by Jesus Christ—in all these, "as face answereth to face, so doth the heart of man to man." We are wonderfully much alike as children of the first Adam, and alike when we become children of the second Adam; and yet no two children of God are quite the same. In human families we meet with great diversity of features among those who are, nevertheless, the offspring of the same parents. In the great family of God the diversity of the features is very wonderful indeed. Look at the four pictures which are so much alike, and which indeed do but represent one, and yet you shall discover in them marked diversity. Learn you this double lesson—that unless your spot is the spot of God's children you are none of his: but also, do not expect to find that spot exactly the same in you as it is in others of his undoubted offspring. As on earth all flesh is not the same flesh, and as in the heavens all glories are not the same glory, for there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; so in the ordinary life of Christians here below there is one Spirit, but there are divers operations. Therefore do not judge yourself by any man's biography. Do not condemn yourself if, after reading John Bunyan's "Grace Abounding," you say, "I never went into these dark places." Be glad that you never did. After reading Madame Guyon, do not condemn yourself if you never heard her

"Torrents," nor felt her ecstasies of divine life. Be sorry that you never have, and aspire after such things, but do not condemn yourself. Here are four pictures, and you may find your likeness in one of the four; but, be not so unwise as to condemn yourself if you are not seen in the other three. "I never went to sea," says one, "this cannot picture me." "I never traversed a Sahara," says another, "this cannot picture me." "I never was in prison in the dark," says a third, "this cannot picture me." But it is possible, dear friend, that you have been a fool, and therefore the sick fool may picture you. When you find yourself in one of the pictures, you may conclude that, as the four are but variations of the same subject, all the four in some degree belong to you. At any rate, if I cannot enter into heaven by twelve gates, I shall be perfectly satisfied to go in at one.

I am only going to bring out two out of the many thousands of things that lie packed away in the wonderful box of my text. There are two things,—*the miserable people*, and *the merciful Lord.*

I. THE MISERABLE PEOPLE, first. I am going to describe them, and my object in the description will be to show what some have been who, nevertheless, have been saved. These people are called fools. They abhorred all manner of meat. They drew near to the gates of death. But they were saved for all that, for they cried unto God in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. The inference will be that if I—if you—should happen to be just in the same condition as these people, yet we may have hope that God will save us.

To begin with, the first description of them is that *they were fools.* Now, I must not call you fools, but you have all of you liberty to call yourselves so. I find it forbidden in Scripture for any man to call his brother "fool," but I do not find him forbidden to call himself so. Look well to yourself, and see whether you are not a fool now :—at least, if God's grace has saved you, you are bound to own that you were once a FOOL in capital letters; for every unrenewed and unregenerate man is a fool. We call those fools who have a great want of knowledge of things which it is necessary to know. Where other men find their way, they are lost. Where other men know what to do upon very simple matters, they are quite bewildered and cannot tell how to act. I remember when I did not know the way of salvation. I had heard it from my youth up, and heard it explained very simply, too; but I did not know it. Many must confess that, though now they understand what faith in Jesus is, yet they were very slow in catching the idea. It is an idea which a babe in grace can explain, but which wise men, classically instructed, do not receive. I may stand here, and beat my very heart out in trying to make plain how men are to believe and live, and yet out of my congregation not one will receive God's meaning into his heart unless God the Holy Ghost shall enlighten him; for we are such fools that the simplest matters of heavenly truth are utterly unknown to us.

He, too, is a fool who, when he does know, does not make right use of his knowledge. He is a greater fool than the former one. He knows all about it, but yet he does not do it. He understands that the only way to be saved is to believe in Christ; but he does not believe. He knows that men must repent of sin if they would find mercy; but he does not repent

of sin. He knows that life is uncertain, and yet he is risking his soul upon the chances of his continuing to live. He lives as if he had a lease of his life, and was absolutely certain that he could not die till he chose to be converted. Now this is to be a fool—to act contrary to your own knowledge and better judgment. How many fools there are of this kind!

We call him a fool who hurts himself without any profit—without any justifying cause. The man who flings his life away to save a nation, or even to rescue one solitary person from death, is a hero; but what is he who, for no motive whatever, will maim himself—will take away his own health—will take away his own life? Are there none such here? Look at the drunkard! Look at the man who is guilty of unclean living! Look at such as prefer this world to the world to come, and throw themselves away on trifles! O sirs, there be many men that have injured themselves so that their sin lies in their bones. Even now they feel the result of their transgressions. The moth is foolish that flies into the candle, and, having burnt itself, dashes again into the flame. We count the ox foolish that goes willingly to the shambles; but there are multitudes of men and women who take delight in sin; and, though every cup around them be poisoned, yet they drink at it as though it were nectar. Verily, sinners are fools!

We are great fools when we think that we can find pleasure in sin, or profit in rebellion. We are great fools when we displease our God,—when our best Friend, on whom our eternal future depends, is despised, neglected, and even rejected and hated by us. It is the extreme of folly when a man loses the good will of one who can help him,—when he rejects the love of a tender mother, and the counsel of a wise father. Some men seem resolved to make their enemies their friends, and their friends their enemies. They put darkness for light, and light for darkness. They go to find the living among the dead, and true helpers among those who pander to their sin. Such fools have you and I been. Peradventure, some here are such fools now.

I call that man a fool who throws away jewels that he may gather pebbles, who casts away gold and silver that he may gather up mire and dirt. And what do they do who fling away heaven and eternal life for the sake of a transient joy, a momentary gain? Are there not some men living in this world only to get what will one day turn into smoke? They know that this great world, and all the works of men that are therein, must be dissolved with fervent heat; and yet they labour to build a mansion for their immortal souls in this place, which is to be utterly burned up. And, meanwhile, thou, O Son of God, Immortal Love, art treated as though thou wert a mere fiction! And thou, great Father, fulness of eternal grace, their backs are turned on thee! And O, holiness, and virtue, and immortal blessedness, all of you are suffered to go by while men are hunting for gewgaws and gathering trinkets that shall so soon be taken from them. If haply as you sit here you confess, "I have been a fool; I know I have," then you may gather comfort from the fact that *fools were saved.* He that has gone to the utmost excess of unwisdom may yet hear the invitation of wisdom, and come and learn at Christ's feet all that is needful for eternal life.

The next thing about these people is rather worse: they were not only fools, but *sinners*. The text says that "fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." You see they had several sorts of sin—transgression and iniquities. They began with one transgression; they went on to multiplied iniquities. There was first in their heart a transgression against God; afterwards, there were found in their lives many in-equities, both towards God and towards man. Sin multiplies itself very rapidly. It grows from one to a countless multitude. We will not go into the details of the transgressions and iniquities that you may have committed; but here is the point,—these people, who were fools, and full of transgression and iniquity, nevertheless cried to God in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. What form has your sin taken? Think of it in your own heart. But, whatever form it has taken, God is able to forgive you. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." There is no sin which is unpardonable if men repent of it. The sin that is unpardonable is one of which no man ever thought of repenting, for it is a sin which is unto death, and when committed the man is spiritually dead, and never repents. If there be a sin upon you, however black and foul—if it be a horrible sin which I could not mention because it might crimson the cheek of modesty if I did but even hint at it—if you are covered with it, polluted with it beyond all imagination—yet, of the saints in heaven it can be said, "such were some of you, but ye are washed." You are not more astray than certain others, or if you are, so much the greater shall be the glory of God's grace in saving you. It is written of our Lord that he is able to "have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way." O you out-of-the-way sinners, what a comfortable word that is for you! No sin shall destroy you if you will come to the sinner's Saviour. No excellence of your own shall save you if you reject that Saviour. Come in all your sin, though it reeks to heaven: though the stench of it be loathsome in your own nostrils, yet, come to Jesus, for "the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

But we must go on with the picture. These people were not only fools and sinners, which are two bad things; but they had a third mischief about them: *they were afflicted.* "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." Their affliction was evidently the result of their folly and their transgression. Do I address any who are in that case? I hardly like to say what may have happened to some here. They may be distressed in spirit, and unable to pursue their business with anything like cheerfulness. They may be subject to doleful forebodings and heavy glooms, and all the result of sin in years gone by. They have now got to the core of the apple of sin. It is wonderfully sweet till you get to the core, and then it is bitter, ay, more bitter than death itself.

Once these men were fools and sinners, and now they have to suffer for it. They are afflicted because of their transgression and their iniquities. Some suffer in body. Others suffer in estate: their property is all gone now. They have spent all. Riotously, foolishly, wickedly it has gone. They had money once; they have none now. They had

the means of livelihood and competence, but they have so sinned that they cannot be trusted now. They are waifs and strays on the great ocean, drifting about, nobody wanting them. How I long to say a word of comfort to those who are in that condition! If you repent, if you will arise and come to your Father, why should you not be delivered out of your distresses? Do you not see that God does deliver such as you are? Is not the case before you in the text? They were fools afflicted, they were sinners afflicted, beginning to feel, even on earth, a part of the result of their sin. They began to reap those sheaves of fire which they sowed with such merry-making years ago; and, as they put those sheaves into their bosom, they wondered how they could escape being immediately consumed. But they did escape, and so may you. God has saved such as you now are, and all those saved ones should encourage you to hope that he will save you.

The picture is getting black, but we must put on another coat of colour. In addition to this, these people *had fallen into a soul-sickness.* Through their trouble and their consciousness of sin, they had fallen into such a state of illness that nothing could help them. The best food was brought to them, but they waved it away: their soul abhorred all manner of meat. Some are in such a state that the amusements which once were joys to them are now wearisome. You have been lately to the theatre, and you used to be charmed there. You cannot make out what has come over it: it seems so dull to you. You used to enjoy cheerful evenings with your merry-making friends, but now you would sooner get upstairs alone, for you feel so wretched. When you are alone, there is one person who plagues you: if you could only get away from him, you would be content; but that person happens to be yourself, and there appears to be no rest for you either in company or in solitude. Your soul abhors all manner of meat. I have known souls to get into such a state that books, interesting and instructive, they could not read any longer. They felt no interest in anything of the sort; and poetry, and all the charms of art, which once they very properly enjoyed, could afford them no pleasure. The best mental recreation cannot give such persons any stay from their fierce, self-destroying thoughts. Ay, and they even refuse good spiritual meat. If the preacher tries to give them milk for babes, that is too weak for them: if he brings out strong meat, that is too tough for their teeth. If he brings them "wine on the lees, well-refined," that is too heating; if he offers the water of life, that is too cold. Nothing will suit them. They grumble at all kinds of teaching. Religious books do not cheer them; even the Bible itself seems stale and unprofitable. You are in a frightful condition, my friends, are you not? You are so sick that the meat which best would suit you is that which you least care for. Yet God has saved some who have fallen into this wretched way; and he invites you to come to him, and trust in him, with the promise that he will save even you, though you are as bad as you well can be.

But the case was worse than that, for we read, "They draw near unto the gates of death." This poor creature was *almost dead.* He could see death-gate and hell-gate right before him. He was lying at death's door, expecting every moment to be thrown through the portal into eternal destruction and endless wrath. I remember when I lay in the

bosom of despair in my own apprehension. I knew that I was condemned on account of sin, and my conscience said "Amen" to the condemnation. I could not plead any reason why I should not at once be taken out to endless execution on account of my sin; and I certainly felt the dread shadow of coming wrath falling upon my soul. AND YET I AM SAVED, blessed be God! And so shall you, dear hearer, though you be ready to die, and ready to be damned, be saved by faith in Jesus. Though you begin to feel the fire-shower falling, and the first of the dread drops have already burned their way into your soul, yet may you escape. The Saviour comes to those who

> Buried in sorrow and in sin,
> At death's dark door do lie.

He brings "salvation" to such; and he says to the dying sinner, "This day has salvation come unto thy house." What a glorious gospel we have to preach to you miserable people!

But yet we have not quite touched up the picture with the last shade of black. This man not only lay at death's door, full of trouble, full of distress, but he was *surrounded by many destructions*. In the twentieth verse we read, "and he delivered them from their destructions." What! Are there many destructions to a man? Oh, yes, a great many! I have known one man destroyed by his shop, another by his wife, another by his children. Many a woman is destroyed by her clothes; many a man is destroyed by his eating; millions are destroyed by their drinking. Everything about us will destroy us unless God saves us. There are a thousand gates to hell, though there is only one road to heaven. One man may perish by debauchery; another may perish by respectability One man may be lost in the ale-house; another man may be lost through his teetotalism, if he makes a god of it. One man may go down to hell by his want of common decency, and another by his pride, and prudery, and self-righteousness. Do not deceive yourself—the way to ruin is easy, and many crowd it. If you want to go to heaven, well, we shall have to tell you a great deal about what is to be believed; but if you want to go to hell, I have no need to tell you anything,—"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" A little matter of neglect will land you in hell. But it is not a little matter of thought that will bring you to heaven; there must be a stirring up of the entire soul—an awakening of the whole man to seek after God in Christ Jesus; or else you shall perish. Surrounded, then, with destructions—snares about your bed, snares about your table, snares in your solitude, snares in the street, snares in your shop, snares at dawn of day, and snares at set of sun—you are in awful, terrible danger; and yet persons surrounded with destructions have been saved, and why should not you? They have cried to God in their trouble, and he has delivered them out of their destructions; will he not do the same at your cry? What a charming word is this for desponding spirits!

II. I have but a minute or two left, where I should have wished for an hour, to speak upon THE MERCIFUL LORD.

Very briefly indeed. This merciful Lord appears in this picture where you do not at first see him. I think I see him in that first

verse: *he sent the affliction.* "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." Ah me! "Are afflicted." Who afflicted them, then? Why, their own Father—their own Shepherd, who saw that they would never come back to him if it were not for affliction. I see you, friend. You are a stray sheep, and I could not get you back. Now you cry, "Alas, I am in trouble!" I am sorry that you should be troubled, but I am not altogether sorry. I can see the black dog is worrying you. It is that he may get you back to the Shepherd. Many will not come back till the black dog has his teeth in their flesh; but if it surely drives you to the good Shepherd, it will be your true friend. I question whether many of us did come to the Lord Jesus Christ until we were afflicted in some way or other. Our bright days led us more and more into sin. Then came a dark day; and then we began to turn. "When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land." Blessed be God for the famine! "He began to be in want": now he will have to test his gay friends and flatterers. There was a gentleman who had drunk his champagne, and put his feet under his mahogany; and the prodigal said, "Now I have fed that man, I dare say he will entertain me now I am in poverty." "I cannot help you," he replied. "Can you give me some employment?" "No. What are you worth? Well, you can feed my pigs." And he "sent him into his fields to feed swine." That is the black dog again. If the gentleman had said, "Oh, yes, my dear young fellow, you were very generous when you had plenty of money, I am very sorry for you; come and live with me: while I have a crust you shall have part of it;" that would have been the worst thing that could have happened, for the prodigal son would never have thought of going home. I say that your troubles are mercies in disguise. Your sicknesses, your poverty, and your misery—oh, I bless God for them! The heavenly Father has sent this rumbling waggon to bring you home to himself. Oh that you would but come to yourself! Oh that you would but come to him! See, the grace of God appears in the very affliction of these rebellious fools.

But note this, further: *they began to pray;* and here we see the Lord again; for no one seeks after God till God has put the prayer into his heart, and breathed a new life into his spirit.

Then as soon as ever he did pray, *the Lord heard the prayer.* We read, "*He sent his word,* and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." So, beloved, all that God has to do, in order to save us, is to send us his word. He has done that by sending his dear Son, who is the incarnate Word. He sends us the word in the shape of the Holy Scriptures; he sends us the word in the preaching of his servants; but what we want most of all is to have that word sent home by the power of the Holy Spirit. "He sent his word, and healed them." There is nothing that you want to-night but to have the word which the Lord has spoken sealed home to your heart, so that you accept it, and believe it. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

I want you to notice how the Lord rescued these people. You see, they could not eat. They had reached such a state of sickness that they could not take anything; they abhorred all manner of meat, and we

do not find that the Lord sent them any meat. No, he sent his word. Did he send his word like a tonic, to give them an appetite? No, he made surer work. Many doctors try to deal with the disease, but God does not. He deals with the patient himself, and his constitution. *He healed them* radically. Then, when he had healed them their appetite came back. They did *not* abhor all manner of meat when once God had healed them. The Lord does not operate upon the symptoms, but upon the person; he does not deliver us from this sin and that sin and the other sin; but he takes away the old heart, out of which the sin comes, and gives a new heart, out of which there come repentance, and faith, and a change of life. If you have a lantern, and it is dark, you may polish the outside of it as long as ever you like, and no light will come out of it: the first thing to be done is to put a candle inside the lantern. This is what the Lord does; and then, when he puts the candle inside the lantern, we say to ourselves, "This lantern looks very dirty, it must be cleaned." Is it any fouler than it was before the light was put into it? It is the same lantern exactly, but, when you put the candle into it, you perceive how dirty it is by the light shining within. It is of no use to try to clean and polish it up till you have placed the lighted candle in it. You know how Mr. Moody puts it. A lady, we will say, takes a looking-glass, and she looks into it; and she sees a spot on her face. That is the use of the looking-glass—to reveal spots; but you never heard of a lady trying to wash her face with a looking-glass, for that is not its use. No, the looking-glass shows the spots, but it cannot take the spots away. First of all, by means of the law, we find out our spots, but we have to go to Jesus Christ, in the gospel, to get those spots taken away. Blessed are those who have gone to him!

"He sent his word, and healed them." With one word, the Lord Jesus at this hour can heal every sin-sick soul before me, for where the word of a King is, there is power. He spake, and the heavens were of old; let him but speak again, and there will be new heavens and a new earth to you. Poor sinner, you are dead, but all that Christ did when he raised the dead in his time was to speak to them; and his word by these lips, through his Spirit, can raise you out of your death in sin. If you are black as the very fiends of hell, and steeped up to the throat in every infamy that God abhors, yet if his word shall come to you, and you receive it into your soul, you shall be saved upon the spot, and delivered from your destructions. Here is a word of the Lord. Obey it, I entreat you. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." Here is another; hearken to it, and live:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Let all that labour and are heavy-laden come unto Christ, and he will give them rest. The Lord grant that you may come at once, without delay, and to his name shall be the praise. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cvii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—30, 505, 597.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

AN INSCRIPTION FOR THE MAUSOLEUM OF THE SAINTS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 1ST, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON MAY 8TH, 1884.

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."—Hebrews xi. 13, 14.

"THESE all died in faith." Believers constitute a class by themselves,—"*These.*" They are the people that dwell alone, and shall not be numbered among the nations. We see a great many distinctions in the world which God takes no notice of: there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, in his sight. But there is a distinction which men think little of, which is greatly observed of God; and that is the distinction between them that believe and those that believe not. Faith puts you across the border most effectually, for it brings you out of darkness into marvellous light, from death to life, and from the dominion of Satan into the kingdom of God's dear Son. It is the most important thing under heaven that we should know that we believe in God. The Holy Spirit puts believers by themselves, and speaks of them as "*These.*"

Believers are a class by themselves, even when they die. It is idle to think that we can mark out a spot in the cemetery where none but saints shall sleep; but yet there is a truth at the bottom of that folly. There is a separation even in death between the righteous and the wicked. The Lord seems to erect a mausoleum in which lie asleep the bodies of his people, and he writes this epitaph across the front, "THESE ALL DIED IN FAITH." As for those who died without faith, they died indeed; but, as for his people, a glorious resurrection awaits them.

> "They sleep in Jesus, and are blest,
> How kind their slumbers are."

The characteristics of God's people are peculiar to themselves. They are all alike in this, they all lived and all died in faith. They were not all equally believers, for some were strong in faith, and others were

weak ; but yet they all had faith, and it continued in them even to the end ; so that, without exception,—"these all died in faith."

We will speak, firstly, of *dying in faith;* secondly, of *the faith according to which they died;* thirdly, of *living by faith,* for that is mentioned in the text, "They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth"; and then, fourthly, of *the faith by which they lived,*—"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

I. First, then, here is DYING IN FAITH. What does it mean?

Does it not mean that, *when they came to die, they had not faith to seek,* but having had faith in life, they had faith in death? I will pronounce no opinion upon death-bed repentance. I have heard judgments far too sanguine, I have heard verdicts far too severe. Where we know little, we had better say little ; but this much I may say : I would not like to lie upon a sick-bed, much less upon a dying-bed, and have a Saviour to seek there. The pains and dying strife are usually enough to occupy a man's thoughts. It frequently happens that the brain is disordered by disease, and he that was clear of judgment before is then scarcely able to think. You must yourself have often seen men departing out of this life to whom it was useless to speak. If conscious at all, they were barely conscious. Have I not pressed the hand, and received no token of recognition from a familiar friend? Have I not spoken into the ear, and yet there has been neither hearing nor answering? Sometimes friends have said, "He seems to know you, Sir, though he knows nobody else"; and certainly there has been a lifting of the eyelid, and a movement of the hand, which made me feel that my voice had penetrated into those dark recesses into which the mind had retired. But what could I say of deep mysteries, or even of simple faith, when the person has been in such a case? It has been a great joy to feel that we could sing in many instances,

"'Tis done, the great transaction's done,"

for there was little hope that it could have been done at that hour. Dear friends, if any of you are delaying, permit me to warn you not to do so! How can it be said of you that you die in faith, if it cannot be said of you that you are living in faith? Not long ago, a friend of mine, who was apparently in robust health, fell dead in the busy streets of the city ; another came up to our religious meetings, and on his return died in the waiting-room of the railway-station. Suppose that this had happened to any of you. It might have done so! Where would you now have been? I bless the name of the Lord that you are spared, for else you would have been where no voice of warning or of invitation could have reached you, but where darkness, death, and despair would have enveloped you for ever.

The saints mentioned in the text had not faith to seek. They had it when they came to die.

They did die, however, although they had faith, for faith is not given to us that we should escape death, but that we may die in faith. I have met with one or two friends who have believed that they would never die, but they have died for all that. One brother has often favoured me with a kind letter of protest when I have spoken about believers dying, for he affirms that he shall never die, and that if a believer does

die it is his own fault, for he must have fallen into sin. It is rather awkward for his theory that all these saints "died in faith." We believe that hundreds, and thousands, and millions of true and strong believers have died; and we expect to follow through the same dark stream of death, unless the Lord shall come.

This proves that God will not in every case hear our prayers for restoration to health. It is not true that if we gather together and pray for a sick man he will always be restored. No believer would die if that were the case, for every Christian man would find some friends in Christ to pray for his recovery. If, therefore, God had thus divested himself of his omnipotence, and put it upon us, we should keep our dear friends here as long as Methuselah, and no one would die. It would be a kind of semi-murder to allow our brother or sister to depart: it would be destroying life by omission to pray, and that would be murder in a degree I thank God that he has not endowed us with any such power, for it would be a very dangerous privilege for any of us to carry about us. Would you have it said that you were the means of the death of your child, or wife, or friend, because you did not pray sufficiently for them? Is a kind of constructive murder to be laid at every man's door when he loses a friend? Is every woman whose child is taken away from her to be charged with want of faith because her child died? This would make her guilty of her child's death. It is atrocious: it is a piece of fanaticism that will not bear thinking of, for, pushed to its legitimate issue, it would be cruel in the extreme, for it would condemn men and women who are perfectly innocent, and who feel that they would have spared the lives of the departed by losing their own, had such a thing been possible.

"These all died in faith." Saints die as well as sinners. David dies as well as Saul. He that leaned on the bosom of Jesus lived long, but died at last—died as surely as Judas did, though in a better style. "It is appointed unto men once to die." Two have entered into glory by another way, but only two. There shall come a day when we that are alive and remain shall not see death; but that day is not yet.

"These all died in faith." I suppose that it means, again, that *these all persevered to the end.* I have often been told that you may be a child of God one day and a child of the devil the next. I do not know upon what Scripture that statement is based. I do not believe a word of it, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." But suppose he apostatizes? You have no business to suppose what God has promised shall not be; for he has promised, "I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." If a man truly believes, he shall be saved. "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger." It has been said that we assert that if a man is once a believer, he may live as he likes, and yet he will never be lost. We never asserted any such thing. It is a caricature of the doctrine that we preach. We believe that God has given to his people eternal life; and that must be true, for he has said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." This means that they shall be kept from sin, and especially shall be preserved from the sin which is unto death. Though they sin through infirmity, they shall not sin fatally,

nor sin finally, but they shall persevere in holiness, and in the love of God. If they wander they shall be restored. They shall be kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation. The seed which God puts into the believing soul is a "living and incorruptible seed, which liveth and abideth for ever." "The water that I shall give him," said Christ to the woman of Samaria, "shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life." He gives no transient salvation, but he gives one which will hold the believer's soul from the first even to the last. "These all died in faith": in every one of these instances grace lived to the last, and triumphed at the close.

Does it not mean, also, that *they never got beyond faith?* These good people—Abel, Noah, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Sarah,—did they never get beyond faith? We have heard of some who think they have done so. Having begun in the Spirit, they are afterwards made perfect by the flesh. First it is the sinner's simple trust; but they get beyond that, and reach "the second blessing." I wish that they would get beyond that also, and reach the third blessing, and then they would feel more deeply than ever the deep depravity of the old nature, and cling still more closely to Christ. To go on from a second to a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh, and an eighth, and a ninth, and a tenth blessing, is the thing for a child of God to do; but to get into a state of pride, and cry that he has got a second blessing, is a poor way of growing. There are ten thousand times ten thousand blessings after which believers are constantly to reach; but, reach what they may, "the just shall live by faith"; he shall never get beyond trusting in the faithful promise of a gracious God, living out of himself upon Christ, who must be our all in all. "These all died in faith," the very best of them. They never got beyond that. How could they? Those who get above faith are like the man who went up so high on the ladder that he came down on the other side. They get to be so good that they trust in themselves instead of resting in him who is the Lord our Righteousness. The Lord save us from self-conceit!

But then, while they did not get beyond faith, *the mercy is that they never got below it.* They still had faith. They were sometimes troubled with suspicions of themselves, and doubts as to whether the Lord had really wrought a work in their souls; but they never quite gave up faith. They had many pains in death, but they did not die in despair. Some of you cry, "What shall I do when I come to die?" I will tell you a more important question, and that is, What will you do now? Take life and death just as they come, bit by bit. You know how the Spartans endeavoured to keep back the Persians. They took possession of the pass of Thermopylæ, and there the brave two hundred stood, and held the way against myriads. The enemy could only advance one by one. Now, do not think of all the armies of your troubles that are coming in the future, but meet them one by one. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." Pray—"Give us this day our daily bread." When you come to die, you shall have dying grace in dying moments; and if you have lived in faith do not doubt that you will die in faith. Joyfully, with all the strength I have, my quivering lips shall sing, instead of doubting or groaning. Faith shall grow stronger when it is about to be changed to full fruition. Go on, dear child of God. Though the road

be dark before you, you can see the next step, and that is all you need to see, for you cannot take two steps at a time. When you reach the next step, you will see the next; and so on to the end. He that has helped you up till now will help you even to the end; and when you are laid in the grave, it shall be said of you, as of all believers that went before you, "these all died in faith."

Thus much upon dying in faith.

II. Now, what was THE FAITH THAT THEY DIED WITH?

Turn to the text, and you get it. "Not having received the promises." They had received a great deal, but *they had not received the fulness of the promises.* Abraham had not beheld his seed so many as the sands upon the sea-shore. Neither Isaac nor Jacob had ever seen the Shiloh, in whom all the nations of the earth are blest. No, they had not received the promises. And you and I have not received all the promises. We have received a great deal, but there are certain promises which we have not received yet. The coming, the glorious coming, which is the brightest hope of the church, when the Lord "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God"—we have not received that as yet. And heaven itself, with all its splendour, its white robes and palms of victory, we have not yet received. We are looking for these. We do not die in the fruition of these. We die in faith, expecting that we shall enter upon the fulfilment of these promises.

But, while they did not receive the promises, notice what they did. *They saw them,*—saw them afar off. Faith touched their eyes with eye-salve; so that Abraham could see his seed in Egypt,—his seed coming out of the land of Zoan. He could see the people travelling through the wilderness. He could see them entering upon Canaan, and taking possession of the land. Yea, our Lord said, "Abraham saw my day." He saw the babe in Bethlehem. He saw the Son of God, who was the Son of man, the son of Abraham, too. And you and I, if we have faith of the kind we ought to have, see already the coming of the kingdom, the gathering together of the saints, the glory of the better land, "the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." By faith we see it. Our faith has such a realizing power that it is as if we beheld it all. It is better to see it thus than with the bodily eye, for if we looked upon it carnally we should begin to doubt our eyes; but faith is the opposite of doubt, the evidence of things not seen.

They did more than that. We read that *they "were persuaded of them."* "What is your persuasion?" said one to a Christian man. He answered, "Well, this is my persuasion: I am persuaded that neither things present nor things to come shall ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." He was persuaded of the truth of that promise; and so is every believer when he is in a right state. He is of that blessed persuasion: he is quite sure about the promises of God. "Airy nothings," mutters one. "Mere fictions," cries another. "Absolute certainties," says the saint. He has been persuaded by an inward persuasion which others know nothing of. The Spirit of the living God has given him a faith which amounts to full assurance, and he will not permit a question, or tolerate a suspicion.

It is more than that: *the saints "embraced" the promises.* The Greek word signifies "salutes," as when we see a friend at a distance. In the clear atmosphere of Mentone, I have sometimes stood on quite a lofty mountain, and seen a friend down in the valley, and I have spoken his name; and at first it was greatly to my astonishment when he replied, "Where are you?" I held a conversation with him readily. I could not have actually reached him for a long time, but I saluted him from afar. At times, dear friends, we can see God's promises afar off, and we salute them. We are within hail of the glory-land, and we send up rockets in the dark; or, if it be daylight, we signal to the shore. Do you never do that? Do you never salute the mercies that are to come? Do you never talk to the glory that is to be revealed, ay, and commune with the glorified? This is the faith to live with, and to die with, the faith that sees, and is persuaded, and salutes the promised blessings of a faithful God. The Lord grant us more of that faith from this time forth!

III. Now, with extreme brevity, I want to speak upon THE FAITH TO LIVE WITH—the life of faith.

How do we live if we live by faith? The answer is, they "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." So we are.

We are *strangers by nature.* Born from above, our life differs from those about us. "The world knoweth us not." We do not belong to this world at all. We are in it, but not of it.

We are strangers as to citizenship. Here we are aliens and foreigners, whose privileges are connected with another city, and not with earth.

We are *strangers as to pursuits.* We are wayfaring men hurrying through this Vanity Fair. The men of the fair cry, "Buy! Buy!" but they have no wares that we care to purchase. We buy the truth, and they do not trade in that commodity. We have nothing to do with the business of the fair, but to get through it as quickly as ever we can. Certain things every traveller has to do when he stops in a town: he must seek his inn, and he must take due refreshment; but if he is travelling home from a far country he moves along as fast as he can.

We are *pilgrims in object.* We have not come hither for a pleasure excursion; we are journeying to the temple to behold the face of our Lord. Our faces are set towards Jerusalem, and we are asking the way thither. Our cry is, "Onward! Hinder me not. I must away to the glory-land, where my home is, where my God is!"

We are *pilgrims as to continuance.* We do not expect to be here long. Do any of you? Ah, then you are under a great mistake. We shall soon be gone. Each time we bid each other "good night" we may do it with the suspicion that we shall not all meet again. There never was the same congregation here twice, and there never will be. Almost every week two members of this church depart for the upland country, and leave us in these lowlands. Of late our death-rate has largely increased, and the conscription for the armies of heaven has fallen heavily upon us. How quickly are we gone! Say to yourself, then, next time you are fretting about worldly trouble, "I will not fret about it. It will not last long." Next time you are tempted to rejoice in earthly treasure, say to yourself, "No, I shall not rejoice in this. It is only a shadow. I will rejoice in something more enduring."

Do not wonder if you are found to be *strangers as to usage*, for the world uses foreigners roughly; and they that are really of Christ must expect to be misunderstood and misrepresented. They burned many pilgrims in former days; they cannot do it now; but there are trials of cruel mockings still, and the seed of the serpent still hates the seed of the woman.

This, then, is the way of believers, they live in this world as strangers and foreigners, who are hasting as fast as they can towards their own country, where they shall hear their own language spoken, and shall abide with their own Father for ever. This is the life of faith.

IV. And what is THE FAITH BY WHICH WE ARE ABLE TO ENDURE SUCH A LIFE AS THIS? Why, it is this faith: "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country."

Our faith is one which we dare to avow. We declare plainly that we seek a country. We are not ashamed to say that this is not our rest, that we do not expect to find pleasure here. We are speeding over this stormy sea to the Fair Havens, where we shall cast anchor for ever. We are not ashamed to say this, however others may ridicule our hope.

And we say it because we believe it. In that day in which Christ washed away our sins he gave us the token that we should be with him where he is, for this is the mark of the blessed—"They have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." That day in which we gave ourselves up to Christ, to be his for ever, he gave us a certificate that we should be with him in the glory, for this is his prayer, "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory." I trust, beloved, no doubt ever crosses your mind as to the fact that every believer in Christ will certainly be in the glory with Christ for ever and ever. But if you so believe, I pray you to believe it strongly, so that you realize it; and if you do, you will sometimes sit yourself down and laugh; and if a neighbour asks you, "Wherefore do you laugh?" you will say, "I laugh with very delirium of delight to think that this poor aching brow shall one day wear a crown—that I shall exchange these dusty garments for the snow-white robes of perfection—that I, whose voice on earth is so poor and cracked, shall one day sing with seraphim and cherubim." Oh, what joy to the invalid to know that he shall leave his bed on which he has suffered so much, and go where the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." There the poor man shall no longer fight with poverty, and earn his daily bread with toil, for the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and none shall know a want.

How glad I am that this shall be in so short a time! Some here present may be in heaven before this year is out; ah, perhaps he who speaks to you now may have gone very soon away to his own country! Shall it cost us any regret? It does for others; for we would fain remain to do them good; but for ourselves the contemplation is one of unmingled delight. The change has no loss about it: it is unspeakable gain. We lose nothing by departing to be with Christ, for it is not only better, but, as Paul puts it, it is "far better."

So now let us refresh ourselves with the thoughts of what we have, and forget what we have lost. Let us just think of what is laid up for us, and forget the penury of our estate below. Come; let us revel in the

prospect of our ultimate perfection, and thus gather strength wherewith to struggle with our present corruption. Come, let us now rejoice, and ring the joy-bells at the prospect of beholding the Well-Beloved's face without a mist or a veil between; and so let us be content awhile to pass through the darkness, even though we see no light. We will meet; we will meet; we will meet in the glory-land. A dear sister the other day wanted to have a long talk with me, and I did not want she should, for I had twenty more waiting, and she said, "Well, dear pastor, I will have a long talk with you when we both get to heaven." And I said, "Ah, that I will, and I will find you out if I can, or you will find me out; and we will converse without hurry." When we begin to speak up there, she will say to me, "How sweet is your voice!" And I shall look at her, and answer, "How beautiful you have become!" We shall be amazed at one another in the perfect country. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when *he* shall appear, we shall be like *him*, for we shall see him as he is." My dear aged friend will forget all her rheumatism; and so shall I. You may be bent half double while you are here below, but you will be straight enough up there. Those dim eyes need glasses, but you will want no spectacles before the throne. Limping, and lame, and halt, you are at this hour; but up there you will be able to join with all the happy ones in that music and dancing which shall celebrate the triumph of Christ. Arise, then, and be glad! Lift up your eyes from the dust and the darkness, and gaze upon the light eternal! The gate of heaven is open! If we may not enter yet, we shall enter before it shuts: let us rest assured of that. The day dawns, and until its full light has come let us rejoice in the anticipation of it. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, let us cry, "Turn, O our Beloved, and abide with us." He will not deny us our fond request.

The Lord bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews xi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—620, 533, 813.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE HORNS OF THE ALTAR.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON MARCH 23RD, 1884.

"And he said, Nay; but I will die here."—1 Kings ii. 30.

WE must tell you the story. Solomon was to be the king after David, but his elder brother, Adonijah, was preferred by Joab, the captain of the host, and by Abiathar, the priest; and, therefore, they got together, and tried to steal a march upon dying David, and set up Adonijah. They utterly failed in this; and when Solomon came to the throne Adonijah was afraid for his life, and fled to the horns of the altar at the tabernacle for shelter. Solomon permitted him to find sanctuary there, and forgave him his offence, and said that if he proved himself a worthy man he should live without further molestation. But very soon he began plotting again, and sought to undermine Solomon now that their venerable father was dead. It became therefore necessary, especially according to oriental ideas, for Solomon to strike a heavy blow; and he determined to begin with Joab—the bottom of all the mischief, who, though he had not followed after Absalom in David's time, was now following after Adonijah. No sooner had the king determined upon this, than Joab, conscience-stricken, began to look to himself and fly. Read the twenty-eighth verse. "Then tidings came to Joab: for Joab had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom. And Joab fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord, and caught hold on the horns of the altar." I suppose that he thought that, as Adonijah had done this successfully before, Joab might repeat it, and have some hope of his life. Of course, he had no right to enter into the holy place, and lay hold upon the horns of the altar; but being driven to desperation, he knew not what else to do. He was a man of hoary head, who had thirty or more years before committed two atrocious murders, and now they came home to him. He did not know where to fly except he fled to the horns of an altar, which he had very seldom approached before. As far as we can judge, he had shown little respect to religion during his lifetime. He was a rough man of war, and cared little enough about God, or the tabernacle, or the priests, or the altar; but when he was in danger, he fled to that which he had avoided, and sought to make a refuge of that which he had neglected. He was not the only man that had done the

same. Perhaps there are some here who before long will be trying to escape from impending woe by like means.

Now, I want you to notice that when Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, and took hold of the horns of the altar, *it was of no use to him.* "And it was told king Solomon that Joab was fled unto the tabernacle of the Lord; and, behold, he is by the altar. Then Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go, fall upon him. And Benaiah came to the tabernacle of the Lord, and said unto him, Thus saith the king, Come forth. And he said, Nay; but I will die here. And Benaiah brought the king word again, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. And the king said unto him, Do as he hath said, and fall upon him, and bury him; that thou mayest take away the innocent blood, which Joab shed, from me, and from the house of my father. And the Lord shall return his blood upon his own head, who fell upon two men, more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword, my father David not knowing thereof, to wit, Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa, the son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. Their blood shall therefore return upon the head of Joab. So Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up, and fell upon him, and slew him: and he was buried in his own house in the wilderness."

I have two lessons which I am anxious to teach at this time. The first is derived from the fact that Joab found no benefit of sanctuary even though he laid hold upon the horns of the altar of God's house, from which I gather this lesson—that *outward ordinances will avail nothing.* Before the living God, who is greater and wiser than Solomon, it will be of no avail to any man to lay hold upon the horns of the altar. But, secondly, there is an altar—a spiritual altar—whereof if a man do but lay hold upon the horns, and say, "Nay; but I will die here," he shall never die; but he shall be safe against the sword of justice for ever; for *the Lord has appointed an altar in the person of his own dear Son, Jesus Christ, where there shall be shelter for the very vilest of sinners if they do but come and lay hold thereon.*

I. To begin, then, first, OUTWARD ORDINANCES AVAIL NOT. The laying hold upon the literal horns of an altar, which can be handled, availed not Joab. There are many—oh, how many still!—that are hoping to be saved, because they lay hold, as they think, upon the horns of the altar *by sacraments.* Men of unhallowed life, nevertheless, come to the sacramental table, looking for a blessing. Do they not know that they pollute it? Do they not know that they are committing a high sin, and a great misdemeanour against God, by coming amongst his people, where they have no right to be? And yet they think that by committing this atrocity they are securing to themselves safety. How common it is to find in this city, when an irreligious man is dying, that some one will say, "Oh, he is all right; for a clergyman has been, and given him the sacrament." I often marvel how men calling themselves the servants of God can dare thus to profane the ordinance of the Lord. Did he ever intend the blessed memorial of the Lord's supper to be a kind of superstitious *viaticum*, a something upon which ungodly men may depend in their last hour, as if it could put away sin? I do not one half so much blame the poor ignorant and superstitious persons who seek after the sacrament in their dying

hours, as I do the men who ought to know better, but who pander to what is as downright a superstition as anything that ever came from the Church of Rome, or, for the matter of that, from the fetish worship of the most deluded African tribe. Do they conceive that grace comes to men by bits of bread and drops of wine? These things are meant to put us in memory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, as far as they do that, and quicken our thoughts of him, they are useful to us; but there is no wizardry or witchcraft linked with these two emblems, so that they convey a form of grace. If you do rely upon such things, I can only say that this error is all of a piece: it is a superstition which begins with, "In my baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven"; which statement is altogether false; and then it continues the delusion by prostituting an ordinance meant for the living child of God, and giving it to the ungodly, the ignorant, and the superstitious, as though it could make them meet for entering heaven. I charge you, as before the Lord, cleanse yourselves of this superstition. There is no salvation apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; and you might as well trust in your sins as in sacraments. In fact, the sacraments become sins to men who trust in them, for these men sin against the ordinances of the Lord by putting them where they never ought to be, and making an Antichrist of them, so as to push Christ out of his place with their baptisms and their masses. If ye die with the sacramental bread in your mouths, ye will be lost unless your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Your hands, which are superstitiously laid upon the altar's horns, might as well be placed upon your weapons of rebellion. Outward emblems can do you no good whatsoever if you remain unspiritual. Without faith in Christ, even the ordinances of God become things to condemn you. If ye eat and drink unworthily ye eat and drink condemnation to yourselves, not discerning the Lord's body; and, if this be true, how dare any unconverted, unbelieving man put his trust in the outward ordinance of which he has no right to partake?

There are others who put their trust in *religious observances of sundry kinds*. Their visible altar-horn is something which they believe to be very proper and right, and which, indeed, may be so if wisely used, for the thing is good if used lawfully; but it will be their ruin if it be put out of its own place. For instance, there are, doubtless, some who think that they are all right because they frequent *sermons*. They delight to be found hearing the gospel. Now, in this you do well, for, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God"; but, if you suppose that the mere hearing of a sermon with the outward ear can save you, you suppose what is untrue, and you build the house of your hope upon the sand. "Oh, sir, I have sat to hear the true gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ these many years." Yes, and these many years you have rejected it. The kingdom of God has come nigh unto you, but I fear it will work your damnation through your unbelief; for it will be a savour of death unto you. I fear that in the last great day it shall be seen that I have ministered unto some of you to your hurt. It will not be laid to my charge, but to yours, if I have been faithful in the declaration of the word. Oh, may God grant that no man or woman among you may ever put the slightest faith in the mere hearing of the

word! Except ye receive it by faith ye deceive your own souls; if ye are hearers only, what good can come of it?

"Oh, but," says another, "I attend *prayer-meetings*." I admit that it is not every hypocrite that will regularly come to prayer-meetings, but there are some that do; and, though you are so fond of prayer-meetings, yet, my dear friend, unless it can be said of you, "Behold, *he prayeth*," you need not make sure of safety. Your being found in the place where prayer is wont to be made may be no true sign of grace. "Ay, but I do more than that, for I have prayers in my own house." Yes, and very proper, too. I would that all did the same; I am grieved that any should neglect the ordinance of *family prayer*. But yet, if you think that the reading of a form of prayer in your household, or even the use of extempore prayer, is a thing to be relied upon for salvation, you do greatly err. "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life"; but he that believes not in the Lord Jesus Christ does but offer unbelieving prayer to God; and what is that but a vain sacrifice which he cannot accept? Oh, do not rely upon the habit of outward worship, or you will lean on a bulrush!

"But I regularly *read a chapter*," says one. I am extremely glad you do, and God bless that chapter to you! I would that all were in the habit of reading right through the Bible regularly, and endeavouring to understand it; but, if you trust in your Bible-readings as a ground of salvation, you are resting upon a mere soap-bubble which will burst under your weight. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, producing in the soul a change of heart, a new birth unto God, this is what is wanted; and, apart from that, all the Bible reading you ever practice can do you no good whatsoever. "Ye must be born again. Ye must be born again"; and if there be not this inward change, then vain is all outward observance. You may wash a corpse, you may clothe that corpse in the purest white shroud that was ever woven, but when all is done it does not live; and what are all the outward devotions of a carnal man but dead things which bring no life with them to men dead in sin?

Some are foolish enough to put their confidence in *ministers*. It would seem to me to be the maddest thing in all the world for anybody to have any confidence in me as to helping him in his salvation; and I trust that nobody is such a fool. I cannot even save myself; what can I do for others? Do not come to me with "Give us of your oil," for I have not enough for myself, except as I keep on begging a supply. When I look at the priests in whom some trust, especially such as I have seen abroad, they may be very fine fellows, but I would not trust some of them with a half-crown, let alone my soul. The very look of most priests makes me wonder how they manage to secure power over people's minds. They may know a great deal, but they do not look as if they were overdone with wit. I would as soon trust my soul in the hands of a gipsy with a red cloak as I would with the best-ordained priest or bishop that ever lived. There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, and he who sets up another is an enemy of souls. There is but one who can be trusted with our soul affairs, even the Lord Jesus Christ; and woe to us if we put our confidence in men! Ordained or unordained, shaven or unshorn, they cannot help us. Yet I know that people do trust in ministers most foolishly. I remember

years ago being at three o'clock in the morning in a house now pulled down, which stood not far from the London Bridge railway-station. A gentleman of considerable means had spent the Sunday at Brighton, had come home, and had been taken with cholera on a sudden, and nothing would do for him, when he was in the pangs of death, but he must send for me. I went, not knowing what was required of me. But when I got there what could I do? There was a little consciousness left to the man, and I spoke to him of Jesus. I asked if he had a Bible. The people of the house searched high and low, but there was no such thing to be found. The mind was soon too beclouded for further comprehension, and as I came away I asked, "Has he ever gone to a place of worship?" No, never—never cared for such a thing; but as soon as he was ill, then, "Oh, send for Mr. Spurgeon!" He must come, and nobody else: and there I stood, and what could I do? There died in the City of London, not long ago, a tradesman of much wealth; and when he came near to die, though I had never seen the man in my life before, he importunately asked for me. I could not go. My brother went to see him, and, after setting before him the way of salvation, he enquired, "What made you wish to see my brother?" "Well," he said, "you know whenever I have a doctor I always like to get the best; and when I employ a lawyer I like a man who is high in the profession. Money is no object. I want the best possible help." Ah me! I shuddered at being so regarded. The best help he could get! That best is nothing—less than nothing, and vanity. What can we do for you, dear hearts, if you will not have our Saviour? We can stand and weep over you, and break our hearts to think that you reject him; but what can we do? Oh, if we could let you into heaven, if we could renew your hearts, how joyfully would we perform the miracle; but we claim no such power, no such influence! Go you to Christ, and lay hold upon the true altar-horn; but do not be so foolish as to put confidence in us or in any other ministers.

"Ah, well," says one, "I am free of that. I am *a professor of religion*, and have been a member of a church now these twenty years." You may be a member of a church fifty years, but you will be damned at last unless you are a member of Christ. It matters not though you are a church-officer, a deacon, an elder, a pastor, a bishop, or even Archbishop of Canterbury, or an apostle, you will perish as surely as Judas, who betrayed his Master with a kiss, unless your heart is right with God. I pray you, put no confidence in your profession. Unless you have Christ in your heart, a profession is but a painted pageantry for a soul to go to hell in. As a corpse is drawn to the grave by horses adorned with nodding plumes, so may you find in an outward profession a pompous way of being lost. God save us from that!

"No," says one, "but I do not trust in a mere profession. I have great reliance upon *orthodoxy*. I will have sound doctrine." That is right, friend, I would have all men value the truth. "My confidence is in my belief in sound doctrine." That is not mine, friend, and I hope that it will not be yours long, for many lost souls have firmly believed orthodox doctrine. In fact, I question whether any one is more orthodox than the devil; for the devils believe and tremble. Satan is no sceptic; he has too much knowledge for that. Devils believe and tremble, and

yet they are devils still. Put no confidence in the mere fact that you hold to an orthodox faith, for a dead orthodoxy soon corrupts. You must have faith in Christ, or else this altar-horn of a correct creed, on which you lay your hand, will bring you no salvation.

I will not enlarge upon this topic. Whatever you depend upon apart from the blood and righteousness of Christ, away with it! Away with it! If you are even depending upon your own repentance, and your own faith, away with them! If you are looking to your own prayers or alms, I can only cry again,—Away with them! Nothing but the blood of Jesus; nothing but the atoning sacrifice; but, if you come and lay your hand upon that, blessed shall you be.

II. That assurance is the second part of our discourse, on which I will speak briefly. COMING TO THE SPIRITUAL ALTAR, AND LAYING OUR HAND UPON IT, WILL SAVE US.

Now, notice first, *the act itself.* Joab came within the tabernacle. So, poor soul, come and hide yourself in Christ. Joab took hold of the horns, the projecting corners of the altar, and he would not let go. Come, trembling sinners, and take hold on Christ Jesus.

> "My faith doth lay her hand
> On that dear head of thine;
> While like a penitent I stand,
> And there confess my sin."

Lean with your hand of faith upon your Lord, and say, "This Christ is mine. This offering for sin is mine. I accept it as the gift of God to me, unworthy though I be."

When that is done, *a fierce demand* may be made upon you. The enemy will probably cry, "Come forth! Come forth!" The self-righteous will say, "What right has such a sinner as you to trust Christ? Come forth!" Mind you say to them, "Nay, but I will die here." Your sins and your guilty conscience will cry to you, "Come forth! Come forth! *You* must not lay hold of Christ. See what you have been, and what you are, and what you are likely to be." Answer to these voices, "Nay, but I will die here. I will never give up my hold of Christ." Satan will come, and he will howl out, "Come forth! What right have you with the Lord Jesus Christ? You cannot think that he came to save such a lost one as you are." Do not listen to him. As often as he howls at you, only say to yourself, "Nay, but I will die here." I pray God that every sinner here may be brought to this desperate resolve, "If I perish, I will perish trusting in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. If I must die, I will die here." For certain, we shall die anywhere else. If we trust in any but Jesus, we must perish. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid." "Without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin." "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not,"—whatever else he trusts to,—"is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." Make, then, this desperate resolve—

> If I must die, here will I die,
> Here at the cross I bide;
> To whom or whither should I fly?
> Where else can I confide?

Say to all those who call you away, "Nay, but I will die here"; for nobody ever did perish trusting in Jesus. There has not been through all these centuries a single instance of a soul being cast away that came all guilty and hell-deserving, and took Christ to be its salvation. If you perish, you will be the first that perished with his hand laid upon Christ. His love and power can never fail a sinner's confidence. Wherefore, may God the Holy Spirit lead you to resolve, "If I must die, I will die here." Listen to me, soul, whoever thou mayest be out of this crowd, man or woman, whatever thy life may have been, even though it should have been that of a harlot or a thief, a drunkard or a profligate, if thou wilt now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt be saved; for, *if not, then God himself will have missed his greatest design.* What did he give Jesus for but to save sinners? What did he lay sin upon Jesus for, but that he might take it off the sinner, and let him go free, and be pardoned? If, then, Christ fails, God's grandest expedient has broken down. That method by which the Lord resolved to show what his almighty grace can do has proved to be a failure if a believing sinner is not saved. Dost thou think that such a thing can ever be? It is blasphemy to think that Jehovah can be defeated. He that believes in Christ shall be saved; nay, he is saved.

If thou art not saved believing in Christ, then Christ himself is dishonoured. Oh, let them once know, down in the dark abode of fallen spirits, that a man has trusted Christ and yet has not been saved, I tell you that they will make such exultation over Christ as Philistia made over Samson when his eyes were put out. They would feel that they had defeated the Prince of Glory. They would trample on his blood, and ridicule his claim to be the Saviour of men. If any soul can truly say hereafter, "I went to Christ, and he refused me," then Christ does not speak the truth when he says, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Then he has changed his nature, foregone his word, and foresworn himself. But that also can never be. Wherefore, dear heart, cling to Jesus, and say still, "If I die, I will die here."

Moreover, *if thou canst perish trusting in Christ thou wilt discourage all the saints of God;* for if Christ can break his promise to one, then why not to another? If one promise fails, why not all the promises? If the blood has lost its power, how can any of us ever hope to enter heaven? I say it will breed great discouragement in the hearts of all people if this be true; for what a wet blanket would be thrown over all thy fellow-sinners! If they are coming to Christ, they will start back, and say, "What is the good of it? Here is one that came to Jesus, and he did not save him. He trusted in the precious blood, and yet his sin was laid to his charge." If one fails, why not the rest? I must give up preaching the gospel when once I hear of a man trusting Jesus and not being saved; for I should be afraid to speak with boldness, as I now do.

If one poor soul that puts his trust in Christ should be cast away it would spoil heaven itself. What security is there for glorified spirits that their splendours shall endure except the promise of a faithful, covenant-keeping God? If, then, looking down from their celestial seats, they behold the great Father breaking his promise, and the Son of God unable to save those for whom he died, then will they say, "We

will lay our harps aside, and put our palms away, for we, too, after all, may perish." See, then, O man, heaven and earth, ay, God and his Christ, as to their credit and their glory, do stand and fall with the salvation of every believing sinner. If I were in your stead to-night, I think that I should bless God to have this matter put so plainly to me. I know that years ago, when I was under a sense of sin, if I had heard even such a poor sermon as this I should have jumped for joy at it, and would have ventured upon Christ at once. Come, poor soul; come at once. You have heard the gospel long enough; now obey it. You have heard about Christ long enough; now trust in him. You have been invited and entreated, and pleaded with; now yield to his grace. Yield to joy and peace by trusting in him who will give you both of these as soon as you have rested in him.

Look! sinner, look! A look out of thyself to Jesus will save thee. Look away from all thy works, and prayers, and tears, and feelings, and church-goings, and chapel-goings, and sacraments, and ministers. Look alone to Jesus. Look at once to him who on the bloody tree made expiation, and who bids thee look, and thou shalt live.

God make this present hour to be the period of thy new birth. I pray it, and so do his people. The Lord hearken to our intercessions, for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms lxi. and lxii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—560, 589, 514.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,—As I am expected to report myself weekly, and have only this corner left to do it in, the bulletin shall be brief. *Weather unsettled; progress fair, but not rapid.* I find myself too readily depressed with small matters, and I have a sense of unfitness for my future work. This shows that while rest has done much, there is more to be done. Three weeks have worked such marvels that I hope in due time to return in full vigour.

My heart is with the Special Services at the Tabernacle; for which I beg every reader to pray daily.

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, February 21st, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

EXCEEDING GLADNESS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 8TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON DECEMBER 21ST, 1884.

"For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance."—Psalm xxi. 6.

YOU have heard a great many sermons upon the Man of Sorrows. I am sure that you have not heard too many; and if, from this time to the end of your life, you should every Sabbath hear of him, and of his sufferings, you will not be nauseated with that theme. You will still feel an intense pleasure in hearing the story of your Lord's griefs, and in having fellowship with him in his sufferings, for by his agonies and death he has redeemed you unto himself. Probably you have never listened to a discourse upon "The Man of Joys!" I venture thus to name the Christ of God. We do not often enough meditate upon the happiness of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that it was for the joy that was set before him that he endured the cross, despising the shame; and the expectation of joy is joy.

The light of his coming reward shone on our Lord's daily path, and made it bright with a glorious hope. Sin is the mother of sorrow, and Jesus knew no sin; conscience never made him a coward; remorse never pricked his heart; malice, envy, and discontent never gnawed at his soul. He was the Prince of Peace, even when he was despised and rejected of men. Deep as were his griefs, we may reckon Jesus of Nazareth among the happiest of men. There was nothing of that efflorescence, that effervescence, that froth of joy, which carnal men value so highly; but there was a deep peace, a calm content, which is beyond all price. Jesus did not enter into such mirth as might have befitted Herod's palace, or Dives' gilded saloons, or Cæsar's luxurious banquets; but he knew such joy as the Son of God must know when his Father heareth him always, and as the Saviour of men must know when his

every word and act are blessing a fallen race. He felt a supreme delight in doing the will of the Father, and in carrying out the purpose of his own gracious mind. He was filled with a mighty resolve, so strong that it beat off every force which would have turned his mind aside from his chosen path; and he felt an infinite love, which found intense satisfaction in yielding up everything for its objects. There was, in fact, even in the midst of the sorrows which were necessary to his service, a satisfaction in bearing those sorrows, a delight in passing through those depths of agony which were necessary for the accomplishment of his grand design.

A man cannot be full of such benevolence as that which filled the heart of Christ, and yet be utterly miserable. Unselfishness brings with it necessarily a measure of joy. A man could not open blind eyes, and unstop deaf ears, make lame men leap, heal lepers, and raise the dead, and yet remain comfortless himself; as well suppose that the sun, which scatters so much heat, may be itself a huge globe of ice. The fountain which yields such streams of blessing has its own flash and sparkle; we feel sure of it. As pearls may lie in plenty in caverns, over which there rolls a dread tempestuous sea, so there slept in the heart of Jesus treasures of joy, even when the ocean of his holy soul was lashed with hurricanes of woe. There is a joy in doing good which cannot be separated from the doing of the good; and the Saviour possessed it beyond conception. There is a joy in living entirely out of one's self for the good of others, and this Jesus drank to the full. There is a joy in achieving a great purpose, even when it is only by sorrow that our design is wrought out, and that also our Redeemer knew. In him was perfectly explained that enigma of Paul, "As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing."

I am not going to say more of the joy of our Lord on earth; and only for a few moments shall I enlarge upon the exceeding gladness of the God-man, Christ Jesus, at this present moment in heaven, though it is to this that our text primarily refers. Jesus has gone up into his glory, and the eye of faith can see him at the right hand of the Father, for ever exalted as Head of the church, and head over all things for her sake. In that position our Lord is filled with superlative felicity. His death is rewarded by the Father with an endless life of bliss: "He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever. His glory is great in thy salvation: honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him. For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance."

I need not enter into the joy of Christ as God, for this is inseparable from his Godhead; but I speak of him now as Mediator, in his complex person standing between God and man. In that capacity, as risen from the dead, and gone into glory, he is supremely glad—*glad because his work is finished.* Such a work as his had so taken up his whole heart, and engrossed his whole being, that it became a baptism to be baptized with, and he was straitened until it was accomplished. It is accomplished now, and the straitening is ended. He has not another act to do by way of obedience to the law; he has not another pang to bear by way of fulfilment of penalty due for our guilt. "It is finished," is the *finis* of his God-like labour. There is not another drop of blood

to be shed; no more chastisement of our peace is to be laid on him; no more stripes are to be exacted for our healing.

"No more the bloody spear;
The cross and nails no more;
For hell itself shakes at his name,
And all the heavens adore."

"*Consummatum est,*" is written at the foot of his throne. His work is so finished that all the results of it are sure; those for whom he died are safe; that which he purchased by his blood he has obtained. He has left nothing undone in any point, so that a degree of failure may yet occur. He has left no stone of the wall to tumble from its place; his work is so completely done that, as he looks upon it all, he feels unmingled joy and content. The Father looks upon him with such a perfect satisfaction in his glorious work, that our text is fulfilled beyond the letter. "Thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance."

"A life eternal as thy years,
A glory infinite like thine,
Repays him for his groans and tears,
And fills his soul with joy divine."

Nor is this all, for Jesus Christ our Lord rejoices to think that now, from this day forth, *God has made him to be the fountain of priceless, numberless, endless blessings to men.* Observe the first clause of our text, and remember that it may be read thus,—"Thou hast made him blessings for ever," that is to say, God has now opened in his Son Jesus Christ, a well of blessings, which will never cease to flow as long as there are men to drink thereat. He is no curse to men, but only blessing; he is not one blessing only, but all blessings; these blessings are the chief boons that even God can give, and they are in Christ Jesus to all eternity. The Lord Jesus, who was once the centre of grief, has now become the source of love, favour, help, healing, benediction, delight, heaven, and whatever else may be called blessing.

"Immortal joys come streaming down,
Joys, like his griefs, immense, unknown."

Nay, blessings do not only come from him, but he is blessings; he is himself made or constituted blessings to all eternity. O thou blessed Lord, we pause to adore and bless thee even now! This makes our Lord exceeding glad, to think that he is in his own proper person the very centre of all blessing to his people. Fulness of blessing abides in him. There is no blessing that you want, poor sinner, but what Jesus has it, has it for you. "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." No blessing that you want, dear child of God, shall be denied you, for "of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace." That fulness abides where it is; it has never diminished, and it never will be diminished throughout eternity.

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

Whenever God makes any one of you to be the channel of blessing to other people, are you not happy? Yes, certainly, in your measure. But what must be the superlative gladness of the Christ in being the centre of centres, the fountain of fountains, to all those who draw near to him? God has made him, beyond all others, and inclusive of all others, to be blessings for evermore. Must he not be filled with gladness?

Our Lord has joy beyond this. I want you to think much of his gladness that you may be able to obey him now, should he say to you, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." At this very hour may his joy be in you, that your joy may be full. Jesus sympathizes with you in your sorrows; will you not sympathize with him in his joys? Should we not rejoice with them that do rejoice, and especially with him, the Bridegroom of our souls? This is a further part of his gladness,—he *joys in the conversion, the comfort, the justification, the salvation of every soul that comes to him.* "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." Almost everybody who preaches from that text is content with the undoubted truth that the angels rejoice over sinners that repent. No doubt they do so; but the text does not tell us so. It says, "There is joy *in the presence of* the angels of God"; that is to say, they are present where there is joy, they look upon the face of Christ, and see the joy which fills his heart as his redeemed ones are renewed by grace. Angels behold the delight that fills the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost as sinners turn from the error of their ways. If, at this moment, a sinner, conscious of his sin, is flying to the cross for refuge, he is making Christ happy. If he is now bowing the knee, and crying, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," that cry of his is music to the soul of his loving Saviour. When that repenting sinner casts himself upon the great atonement, and rests in the sacrifice of Jesus, the heart of Jesus receives a part of its infinite reward, and the promise is in a measure fulfilled, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." You know the meaning of the suggestive figure couched in those words: the soul of Christ was in pangs, like a woman in travail, for these souls, and they are born to eternal life as the result of his soul's labour; and then, as the mother sees the child, and remembereth no more her sorrow for joy that a man is born into the world, so does the Saviour see each one of his beloved ones born to himself, and feels a joy so great that he is more than recompensed for having died on the cruel tree. Oh, the joy of Christ over a soul that turns to him! O my hearer, think of it! Consider! Is it really so? You are capable of making the heart of Christ to throb with joy unspeakable even now! My beloved hearer, you have lived in sin, and I fear you will die in it. Nobody thinks much of you, and you feel the neglect. You are even now sighing, "No man careth for my soul"; but Jesus cares for you, and if you come to him, you shall fill his loving heart with gladness: your forgiveness, renewal, and salvation will cause him to rejoice in spirit. What say you? If the Christ in glory values you, I beseech you do not trifle with yourself, or lie down in despair.

Moreover, I believe that Jesus in glory finds great *joy in all the deeds of his saved people.* Whenever he sees one of his believing people counting his reproach to be greater riches than all the treasures of

Egypt, our Lord is glad. When he sees a heart that has been washed in his blood true to him, refusing to believe false doctrine, or to do that which is unjust, then is Christ glad over his disciple. When he sees you plotting and planning how you can honour him, when he marks your self-denials, when he sees you prayerful, earnest, active, spiritual, loving, his gladness is great. I tell you all the love you have to him he delights in; and your childlike confidence in him, and your little struggling light which seeks after more light, and your earnest longings for his coming and his kingdom, and those broken words of yours by which you speak to others of his love:—all those things he sees with exquisite pleasure. These are flowers that would not have grown in your garden if he had not sown them there. If there be anything that is honest, and true, and holy, and heavenly, and Christly, it is all his work; and he is right glad to see it. I know you will think that he sees in us much to grieve him, and I grant you that he does: but he knows our frame, and he remembereth that we are dust; but when he sees anything that his own Spirit has wrought in us he beholds it with intense complacency, and deigns to take a continual pleasure therein.

Moreover—and I speak gently and softly here—I believe that our Master derives a divine satisfaction from *the holy sufferings of his people*, when they bear pain with patience, when they praise his name on their beds, and adore him in the fires, and when coming to die, they bear themselves calmly in the last dread article, behaving themselves as men who know no fear. When they walk through the very jaws of death, fearing no evil, simply confiding in the eternal Christ; then is Jesus glad to see how well they have learned the lesson which he taught them. When they come up on the other side of Jordan, like sheep from the washing: when they appear before his throne, "without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing"; when the shining ones draw near before him, and cast their crowns at his dear feet; when they lift their united hallelujahs unto him that loved them, and washed them from their sins in his precious blood,—then is the King exceeding glad. My tongue cannot possibly tell out to you the *joy of our Lord in his people's joy*. It is from Christ that heaven's gladness comes, and it is into Christ that heaven's gladness flows. He gives the redeemed all their bliss, and he receives from them all that bliss as they lovingly ascribe their salvation to him alone. He at this moment is heaven's centre, the happiest of the happy, the blessed Leader of a blessed company, the triumphant Captain of a triumphant band, who, having gone forth conquering and to conquer, have at last finished the fight, and sheathed the sword, and shared their Master's victory. They cry unto Jehovah, "Thou hast made *him* exceeding glad with thy countenance," and they themselves partake of that gladness.

All this is my preface at this time, and I need not apologize for the length of it, since its theme might fitly have been that of the whole discourse.

The sermon shall be somewhat short, and I trust it will be sweet. This is the subject of it: I desire that the Lord's people may enter into this joy of Christ, and that, as each one of them is made a king, the text may be fulfilled in each one of them. I have not described to you

the gladness of our Lord as it ought to be described, but I can do no better. If you will endeavour to share in it, you will make up for my deficiencies. May the Holy Spirit aid you!

I. First, I would remark, that GLADNESS IS THE PECULIAR PRIVILEGE OF SAINTS. "Happy art thou, O Israel!" "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous."

Why should we not be glad? *It is all right between us and God.* If, having rebelled against him, we had never repented, and had never been reconciled, we ought to be miserable. He that is out of order with God may well be out of order with himself. But we have been brought nigh; we have been adopted into the family of God; we have obtained reconciliation through the precious blood, and have enjoyed the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace; ought we not to be glad? Dear heart, there is no quarrel between thee and God: peace has been made through Jesus Christ; the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, doth keep thy heart and mind through Christ Jesus. If thou hast not a right to be happy, who has? In a well-ordered government, those that are friendly with their prince have a right to rejoice in his courts: and in the government of God, it seems but right and natural that those who are made to be at peace with God should be among the gladdest of heaven's courtiers. It is meet that we should make merry and be glad. Let us take advantage of that right, and may the Spirit of joy make us glad at this good hour!

In addition to the fact that they are right with God, *believers have their present solaces* in many ways. Grace endows them with immediate joys. I like that part of our song which we sang just now,—

> "The hill of Zion yields
> A thousand sacred sweets,
> Before we reach the heavenly fields,
> Or walk the golden streets."

If I were to try and tell all the things that make Christians glad, even here below, I should have to make an endless catalogue. Where should I begin? Once beginning, where should I leave off? You can count your sorrows, dear brother, I dare say. You are quite *au fait* at adding them all up; but I would have you to recapitulate your joys with equal readiness. Why not? Review the shining ranks of your mercies. Are they not new every morning? Is not the faithfulness of God exceeding great? Oh, my brothers, God has done so much for us that we are glad! He has surprised us with the greatness of his goodness! If I had been sure, thirty-five years ago, that I should have possessed, in the covenant of grace, such a portion as I have at this hour, I think I should have leaped out of my body for joy. When I was under a sense of sin, if I had been assured that I should yet be forgiven, I do not know that I could have contained myself for delight. When I was lying under the chastening hand of God, on account of my transgressions, if I had known that he would turn his face upon me, and smile upon me, and make me his child, and put me into the ministry, and permit me the great privilege of telling out the wonders of his grace, I verily believe that it would have been too great a weight of joy; it would have crushed me with too much delight. And yet, at this moment, I

am not half as glad as I should be warranted in being, because of the unspeakable mercy of God to me. Just apply that reflection to your own cases. Is there not about you now that which would have made your mouth water if you had known twenty years ago that you would be what you now are? Ay, fifty or sixty years ago, mayhap, if it could have been revealed to you that you would live to be a man verging upon eighty, still rejoicing in God, you would have said, "No, not I. I shall fall a prey to the enemy long before that. I shall go back and prove to be a hypocrite long before that." You would not have credited that the Lord would ever have done so much for you as he has actually done. Come, do not rob your God of his praises. Defraud not your King of his revenue of glory. Do not get fretting and stewing about nothing at all; but rejoice in the Lord always, and then again rejoice. This is an appointed feast; let us keep it. "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." I heard a brother in a prayer-meeting say, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we *desire to be* glad"; and I wanted to jump down that man's throat, and pull that passage back again, and put it into its natural shape. What business had the brother to mend the Bible, and talk such wretched stuff? "Whereof we *desire to be glad*"! Why, if the Lord has done great things for us, we *are* glad, we cannot help it, and blessed be his name we do not wish to do so!

In addition to that, *we have a brilliant future before us.* We are the heirs of great expectations. The children of God not only possess present mercies, like the leaves and flowers of summer, but things which God hath prepared for them that love him, laid by in store, like the fruits of autumn. Come, think of heaven for a moment or two, and anticipate its glory. Put on your crown for a little while, and wear your white garments! Can you not take a palm-branch in your hand in imagination, and sing the new song in your heart? You know that you will be thus arrayed, and thus occupied, within a short time; then go through your part, rehearsing it by a lively hope. The glorious hour will soon arrive when you shall be near and like your God, and reign with him for ever. At this present moment there is a place in heaven for me that nobody can ever fill but my own self; and Jesus has gone before, not only to prepare it, but to prepare it *for me.* There is a crown that no head but mine can ever wear, and a song that no tongue but mine can ever sing; and I shall soon cast my crown at Jesu's feet, and chant before him my hallelujahs. That is true of every believer here. Wherefore, be glad; yea, rejoice before the Lord with all your might. Brother, you have not much here, but you will have everything hereafter. You have but a little farther to journey through the great and terrible wilderness, and you will be in Canaan, and possess the land that floweth with milk and honey. Wherefore be glad.

The children of God have further cause to be glad, because *they have all blessings secured to them,* so that they shall never lose them. That which their God has promised them shall never be alienated from them. They are in a position of indisputable security, for they are hidden in the wounds of Christ, as in the clefts of the Rock of Ages. They shall never die, for they are members of his body who is immortal. They are in that hand from which none can ever snatch them. "I give unto my

sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish: neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." Wherefore let us begin to be merry, as it is said in the parable of the prodigal son. "They began to be merry." I have read that parable ever so many times, and I have looked to see whether it is written that they ever left off being merry, and I cannot find that they did. "They began to be merry." Very well, let us begin to be merry at this hour, dear friends, and let us never leave off as long as we live. Let us rejoice *evermore*. As long as we have a God to rejoice in, let us rejoice. As long as we have a heaven to go to, let us rejoice. As long as we have an eternal covenant ordered in all things and sure, let us rejoice. As long as we have any being, let us rejoice in the Lord.

II. Secondly, let me remark that THE SAINTS' GLADNESS IS OF A PECULIAR SORT.

The gladness which is peculiar to the children of God is *a gladness that God has wrought in them*. "*Thou* hast made him exceeding glad." Oh, yes, I heard him! He seemed very glad, but when he began to explain to me his gladness, I could tell by his hiccough where he got it: he owed it to the deadly cup. Shame on him! Oh, yes, he was exceeding glad; but when I saw his merriment, I could tell that it was his youth and his good health that gave him his gladness! These will soon vanish away. But the child of God owes his gladness to a deeper source: God has made him glad. He that can touch the secret springs of the heart, apart from circumstances, or conditions, has often made a man glad when he has been racked with pain, or when he has been in the depths of poverty, or when he has been suffering at the demoniacal hands of inquisitors.

Saints drink from a spring which neither dries in summer nor freezes in winter; for *that which is of God's making remains*. "Your joy no man taketh from you." If God has made you glad, then the devil cannot make you sad. If God has made you glad, then it is not the weather, and it is not your property, and it is not your health, and it is not your friend, neither is it your foe that can make you unhappy. If it is written, "Thou hast made him glad," then the man is glad indeed. Beloved, I wish that every one of you had that joy which only God can give you, that better part which, once obtained, none can take away. It comes from God, and from God alone, and when he bestows it, it is yours for ever, for his gifts are without repentance; he never takes back that which he has once granted. This is the joy which is worth having, for it is full, deep, lasting, everlasting. They say that philosophers can be merry without music; and certainly Christians can joy in God without outward comforts, and they can even take joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Happy people, to whom even losses are gains, and burdens are helps!

Notice, next, in the text, that the gladness which God gives to his people is no ordinary gladness, but *an exceeding joy*. "Thou hast made him *exceeding* glad,"—exceeding: exceeding hope, exceeding measure, exceeding the gladness of others, exceeding any delight that can come from any other source. "Thou hast made him exceeding glad": one man has become wealthy, and he is glad; but the child of God, if the Lord has smiled upon him, is exceeding glad. Here is one that feels his blood leaping in his veins with health, and he is merry as the birds

in summer-time because of it; but when the Lord turns again the captivity of his people, and smiles upon them, they are exceeding glad. I wish that I could tell you how our eyes sometimes flash and sparkle, how our whole spirit dances within us for excessive joy, when a sense of divine love is poured into our souls. I cannot communicate by any description what it is, but, brethren, you can surely guess, for you perhaps have felt the same; and if you have, you would not change with Cæsar for his empire, nor with an archangel for his starry throne. No, when God lifts up the light of his countenance upon his people, it is a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory which he lays upon them. Then do they sing, "Joy, joy, joy!" I speak what I do know, and testify what I have felt. May you know it! May you feel it now!

I know that worldlings imagine that we Christians are a miserable crew, and I fear that too often we turn our worst side foremost when we are with them. I am told that many shop-keepers are so poor that they put the most of their goods in the shop-window; but this is a method which few Christians follow; for the opposite is the fact, their window is badly set out, and yet they have a costly stock upon their shelves. The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light, in this as well as other things. I would recommend such believers to dress their window a little, and show some of their better things. Put your ashes into the back yard, but pour out the oil of joy in the parlour. Let people see that, after all, there are great advantages in belonging to the Lord's household. But whether we *seem* to be happy or not, I can speak as one who has not been without abundant affliction and trial, we who believe in Jesus *are* a happy people, an enviable people. "Happy art thou, O Israel," said Moses; and we can bear witness that he spake the truth. I would change with no man. So long as I know whom I have believed, I would prefer my own lot to that of any I have ever seen or heard of. I leave that point; but be ye sure of this, that God-given joy is no common treasure.

But, according to the text, this joy *comes to us in one way*. "Thou hast made him exceeding glad *with thy countenance*." Have you not sometimes been made very glad with the look of a friend's face? I believe that there is more heart-cheer in the sight of some countenances than in sun, and moon, and stars. Oh, the joy that I had a little while ago in looking upon one dear face that I shall not see again for many a day, for it must needs be seen on the other side of the globe! What joy I have had in looking upon some of you when you have come to tell me what the Lord has done for you, and I have seen your joy in the Lord! "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend." Certain friends of ours carry with them countenances which are always a half-day's holiday to me whenever I look on them. I do not say that this is true of all of you, for I know some knights of the rueful countenance, whose faces are long and dismal; and I would urge these to look into the face of Jesus till his brightness illuminates them. There are those among us who are so brimming over with sacred joy that a glance at their faces refreshes our hearts. Now, catch my thought—What must the countenance of God be? The countenance of a friend to a friend, of a bridegroom to his bride, of a wife to her husband, of a father to his child; each of these spreads gladness: but

what is the countenance of God to his elect? It is a countenance that seems to say, "I am reconciled; your sin is put away." Oh, the gladness of seeing that face! It is a face that seems to say, "I am watching you; I am caring for you; I am smiling upon you." Is not this a gladdening look? Lord, thou has made me glad with thy countenance. "How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! Carefully and continually thou dost think upon me, and watch over me, to do me good." Thus to see the observing countenance of God is a great delight to his people.

What shall I say of his approving countenance? When God has looked upon you, and seemed to say, "You are doing right. Men blame you, but I accept you. Dear child of mine: you are doing my will. You are following me in reproach, and I will abundantly reward you,"—this makes a man exceeding glad, and nerves him to bear reproach and misunderstanding, however cruelly they may assail him.

Again, when you come before God in prayer, and you are pleading with him, and your faith discerns that glorious face—the face of Jesus, your heart cries, "I am accepted: God is hearing my prayer. I may ask what I will, and it shall be done unto me. I am not praying like a stranger; I am pleading like a child. I have my Father's ear and heart, and his countenance is toward me." Oh, then it is a glad time with you! You are being heard, and answered, and your heart beats to music.

When the Lord looks on his chosen follower, and says, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love. I love thee inexpressibly; I love thee without measure; I love thee as I love my Only-Begotten; and I will love thee when time shall be no more. I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,"—then again our heart is glad, and our glory rejoiceth; we should not be afraid for our flesh to rest in hope, for at such a time we could either live or die without a question, so fully is our heart filled with God. Then does our face shine like that of Moses when he came down from the mount. Out of heaven, there is no gladness that is worthy to be compared with the bliss of knowing that the Lord has set his love upon us. This is the fulness of the vintage, and all beside is as the gleaning of the grapes when the summer is ended.

I have not time, you see, to open up this grand subject fully, but such is the joy of God's people. It comes from a clear sense of the divine approbation. We must walk with God, and be heartily agreed with him, or we shall not possess this felicity. Whenever the child of God feels, "I was wrong; God is grieved with me;" then he goes slinking off to bed like a child that cannot have a good-night kiss; and there is no gladness for him. But when, on the contrary, the Lord turns to him in love and mercy, and says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee;" and when he smiles upon us in Christ Jesus, then we can say with the Psalmist, "Thou hast made me exceeding glad with thy countenance."

I will not detain you many minutes more, except to say that this joy of the believer *comes to him through many channels.* Heaven has many windows, and out of each one of them the Lord pours out benedictions upon his chosen.

Let me read a part of the psalm. "The king shall joy in *thy strength, O Lord.*" Oh, it is a great thing, when you are weak, to be strong in God, for then you will be happy. Divine strength brings divine gladness with it.

"And in *thy salvation* how greatly shall he rejoice!" God's salvation, the election that brings us into it, the redemption that makes us full possessors of its blessings, the effectual calling which leads us to accept it, the eternal love which holds us fast in it,—why, in all these how greatly do we rejoice!

Next, *answers to prayer* make us rejoice. "Thou hast given him his heart's desire, and hast not withholden the request of his lips." When a man comes from the mercy-seat, like Luther, saying, "I have conquered, I have won my suit with God," what gladness has the Lord given him!

"For thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness." God is beforehand with us: he outruns us in love. Here is another source of joy—when God *gives us mercies before we seek them,*—when he lays them in our road, and there they are ready for us before we come to the spot. When David was made a king, I am sure he said, "I never thought, nor sought, nor wrought to be a king." Many of us have received choice blessings, of which we said when we obtained them,—"Whence is this to me? I never dreamed of this. This was not in my programme. I never proposed this to my soul in her hours of largest desire. Thou preventest me with the blessings of thy goodness."

Brethren, such things as these tend to make God's people glad in their hearts.

This is my last word to you,—be glad in the Lord. I do not ask you to simulate happiness—to pretend to be glad when you are not; I do not ask you to sing when your heart feels that it must sigh: but I do ask you to be glad when there is reason so to be. Be true and real in all your expressions; but let that truth and that expression spring from an educated soul that has been in the school of Christ, and has learned what the facts of the case really are. Let your feelings be according to truth, and your condition of heart according to the eternal settlements of immutable love. What are the facts of the case? Here they are,—"O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me." If I do not praise thee, the timber out of the wall must cry out against me. If I do not rejoice in thee, I shall be a traitor to my own consciousness, and false to my own convictions, for thou hast brought my soul up out of the horrible pit, and out of the miry clay, and thou hast set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings; and I must have a new song in my mouth, even praise for evermore. I would, if I could, stir you all up to a burst of holy joy, a blaze of sacred gladness. Put on your silver sandals, and your bridal ornaments. Take off your weeds, and gird yourselves in white raiment. Doff the sackcloth and ashes, and put on your beautiful array. Cast aside your chains; leave them for those to wear who love them; and walk at large, in liberty, bedecked with the jewels of infinite grace, and crowned with the diadem of loving-kindness. Sing unto the Lord a new song; and end it not till you get to heaven, and then it will never end. "I will

sing unto the Lord as long as I live. I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being."

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Saviour Jesus Christ,
Who hath blessed us with such blessings, all uncounted and unpriced!
Let our high and holy calling, and our strong salvation be,
Theme of never-ending praises, God of sovereign grace, to Thee!"

Hallelujah! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms xx, xxi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—333, 21, 720, and 288.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—As requested, I append a line or two to the sermon in which my personality must appear far more than I should choose if it were left to my option. This week I am considerably improved, and believe that I have fairly turned the corner, and may hope to come back in good order for future service. I cannot yet call myself free from fits of deep depression, which are the result of brain-weariness; but I am having them less frequently, and therefore I hope they will vanish altogether. I have preached twice to the little gathering in this town. After the first sermon, I felt very much wearied, and could not sleep; but on the second occasion that experience will not, I trust, be repeated. I cannot be sure, for I am writing just as the service has ended, but at present I feel refreshed by having told out once more the gospel of the grace of God.

I regret that during the last two weeks the funds for the College and Orphanage have been coming in very scantily; and for the Colportage and Evangelists there is next to nothing. Colportage is always deserving, and always needing more aid, but not getting it. The work of our Evangelists, by which, under God, many sinners have been converted, and churches revived, is just now very short of income. With one grand exception, namely, Weston-super-Mare, the churches visited of late by our Evangelists, Messrs. Fullerton and Smith, have not been able to defray the cost, and this is likely to be the case in several future instances. At this moment I do not see how such needs will be met. This is God's work, and I think it meet to say to my brethren that I should be glad of help in it, before I am tempted to be anxious about it. I am *not* troubled about it at present; but as I am only my Lord's steward, and have no means of my own for carrying on this most blessed service, I can only mention it to HIM, and to his servants. For all these works God will provide. Without our spending money in advertised appeals, he will use this simple hint, and lead his stewards, who judge us to be faithful, to keep the army of the Lord supplied with ammunition.

To one and all I send hearty Christian love.

Yours to serve, for Christ's sake,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, March 1, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HOW "THE UNSPEAKABLE" IS SPOKEN OF.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 15TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON OCTOBER 9TH, 1884.

"And men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts: and I will declare thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness."—Psalm cxlv. 6, 7.

IN this psalm David has reached the Beulah land of his songs, where we hear nothing else but praise. He begins, "I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever"; and he closes with, "My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever." Happy is our condition when the glory of God fills both heart and tongue! Oh, to swim in a sea of gratitude, to feel waves of praise breaking over one's joyful head, and then to dive into the ocean of adoration, and lose one's self in the ever-blessed God!

The royal singer strikes a high note as he repeats the stanza, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable." We never reach the height of that great argument till we confess that it is far above us, and altogether unsearchable. We have not apprehended God if we imagine that we have comprehended him.

Next David found comfort in the thought that he was not the only worshipper of the Lord, and that the praise of God would not cease when he fell asleep in death. He foresees an endless line of praiseful hearts, and utters this sure prophecy, "One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts." But as if he would not and could not leave the blessed task to others, but must continue his own joyful hallelujahs, he cries, "I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works." Whatever happens, we must each one extol the Lord. Whether the world grows atheistic or devout, our duty and our joy are one and the same,—we are still to magnify the Lord our God. We do not wish to avoid this profound pleasure; nay, rather we would abound in it more and more.

All this leads up to a consideration of the various ways in which men speak of the Lord and his acts when their minds are moved in that direction. All see not the same points of his greatness, neither do they see with the same eyes, nor speak in the same spirit. It is ours at this time to review the various orders of mankind, and to observe how the revelation of God to them affects their minds and moves their tongues.

There is an ascending scale in the four sentences of our text, as the poet-prophet observes and records the ascending forms of human thought and speech.

I. We begin at the lowest step of the ladder. "*Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts.*" We mingle with the multitude during a great occasion of national calamity, or upon the receipt of thrilling news from a foreign land, and we hear THE AWE-STRUCK TALK of the throng. We join a sobered and thoughtful company: they have come together under a common fear, and they speak one to another of the terrible acts of God because they impress them at the moment. They are of the Athenian kind, desiring continually to say and hear some new thing, and now they have found a novel subject which has the piquant flavour of terror. God has been doing terrible things, and they cannot help speaking of them: they have overlooked his mercies, but they must notice his judgments, as it is written, "Lord, when thy hand is lifted up they will not see; but they shall see and be ashamed." Not only shall they see, but they shall speak too,—"Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts."

There have been times in human history when this text has been fulfilled with tremendous emphasis. The first men who lived after the flood must have been affected with the solemn memory of the universal deluge; they must have often spoken to one another concerning God's terrible acts, when he drew up the sluices of the great deep, and burst open the reservoirs of heaven to drown a guilty world. They that dwelt over against the five cities of the plain, once so prosperous and rich, withal so luxurious and vicious—they, I say, that dwelt in the neighbouring cities must have said one to another, "Have you heard what has happened—how God has rained fire out of heaven upon those wicked cities?" Men after all these ages can scarcely go that way, and mark how desolation rules over the Dead Sea, without speaking in bated breath to one another, and saying, "Here vengeance triumphed."

Egypt was full of this talk once, when the plagues followed each other like terrible claps of thunder. One peal had not ceased before another blast astounded them. The noise thereof went beyond Egypt, and in many a palace monarchs heard how Jehovah had gotten unto himself honour upon Pharaoh. It was as Moses sang, "Then the dukes of Edom shall be amazed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling shall take hold upon them; all the inhabitants of Canaan shall melt away. Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased."

So was it also when the sword of Joshua was taken from its scabbard in the name of the Most High, and Jehovah began to deal out execution against the nations that had gone into uncleanness and given themselves over to abominable lusts. When Israel went from city to city, as the

appointed executioner of the Most High, then men everywhere spake one to another of the might of Jehovah's terrible acts "until their hearts melted, neither was there spirit in them any more."

These are but early instances in the grey old past, but they are typical of like judgments which are scattered throughout history. The terrible acts of the Lord are few, but no age is quite left without them, for the Lord liveth still, and he is evermore the same. He punishes nations in this present life. Seeing that there will be no resurrection for nations as nations, and no judgment day for nations as nations, they are judged in time, and their sins are followed up by national judgments. Have ye not heard of the might of his terrible acts that happened unto Babylon? Know ye not that he made Nineveh to be such a heap of ruins that for many a century it was altogether hidden away from mortal ken? Have ye not heard what God did to the colossal empire of Rome, when it had filled up the measure of its iniquity? Do ye not remember how he broke it in pieces as with a rod of iron? No Englishman should ever forget in modern times how the Armada of Spain was given as chaff to the wind, and that cruel, persecuting power was degraded from her pre-eminence. Men have spoken again and again to one another as they have hidden away from the scourge of war, or as they have stood weeping at the graves of their beloved ones slain by the pestilence which walketh in darkness, and they have said, "Behold the might of Jehovah's terrible acts!" Men will speak of that side of the Lord's dealings if they are dumb concerning his innumerable benefits.

When God's judgments are abroad in the world the inhabitants thereof shall learn righteousness; and this is a consolation in times of disaster and death. None of us would dare to desire these judgments: we are of another spirit from Elias, who, in holy jealousy for Jehovah his God, could pray that there should be no rain by the space of three years except according to his word. But yet the thought must have crossed the mind of many a faithful follower of God that atheistic nations ought to feel the rod to startle them into thoughts of God, and oppressing peoples ought themselves to taste the bitter cup of tyranny. "By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God." "Shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him?" Will he not smite the beast and the false prophet, and put down falsehood and wickedness? It shall be even so in due time.

The least that we can do, whenever these terrible acts are abroad, is to turn them into special prayer, and cry mightily to God that men may speak of the might of his terrible acts, and may learn to "kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and they perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." It behoves us when we see the black clouds overhead to pray that they may break in mercy upon the nations, and that God himself may appear in infinite love, though he should make the clouds his chariot, and ride upon the wings of the wind.

"Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts." These things leave a mark, and make for the while a manifest impression. Such, however, is the heart of man that oftentimes the impression is as when one lashes the water, and no scar remains; for it is natural to fallen man to forget God. Sinners pray in a storm, and curse again in the calm. When the

pestilence is abroad, they tremble and adore; but they become atheists when the graves are all filled, and things return to their usual course. When God sends forth pestilence (and he has of late scourged cities that are scarce a day's ride from us), let us pray that the scourge may not fall upon our own land. Yet I do remember, when first I came to this city, how many days and nights I stood at the bedside of men and women dying of cholera; and though it was a grievous thing, and this neighbourhood felt the scourge very heavily, yet I noticed that infidelity was singularly quiet, and that persons who never entered a place of worship before began to attend our services. Bibles were routed out of the dust in those times, and religious talk was tolerated. The minister, who was formerly the subject of their caricatures and jokes, was viewed with reverence for the time being, and his visits were sought for in the hour of sickness. It is wonderful how men laugh on the other side of their mouths when God begins to deal with them—how those who scoffed the loudest are the first to wince when the lash falls on them. The boldest blasphemers are the first to cry out when the Lord binds them with his cords. They cannot bear the touch of God's finger, and yet they have often dared to challenge his hand to be laid upon them. O Lord, men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, when they are driven in utter dismay to bow their ungodly heads, and own that the Lord reigneth!

Dear friends, whenever you find sickness in a house, or death in a darkened chamber, sieze the opportunity to speak for your Lord. Your voice for truth will be likely to be heard, for God himself is speaking, and men must hear him whether they will or no. Meanwhile, plead earnestly that the hammer of God may only break hard hearts, and that the fire of God may consume nothing but that which is evil. Pray that the Holy Spirit may work with the chastisement, to produce health and healing to the souls of men.

II. Be ready with the second part of our subject, which is this—THE BOLD DISCOURSE. Observe how the one follows the other:—"Men shall speak of the might of thy terrible acts, *and I will declare thy greatness.*" After the many have spoken in awe, I will deliver my soul with courage. Come in, O single testifier for God, for now you will be welcomed! When they have advanced so far as to tremble at God because he has begun to smite them, do you stand forward and declare his greatness. The might of his terrible acts has made them see the greatness of his power; they perceive what plagues are in his quiver, and how easily he can draw them forth like arrows, and shoot them from his bow, and never miss the mark. They are obliged to confess all this, and thus a good groundwork is prepared for something more. Tell them of the greatness of his justice, and how he will by no means spare the guilty. Tell them of the greatness of his grace, and how in the person of Jesus Christ he passeth by iniquity, transgression, and sin. Tell them of the greatness of his fatherly love, and how he presses returning prodigals to his bosom, and kisses away their tears. Tell them of the greatness of his saving power to lift up men from the dunghill, and set them among princes, even the princes of his people. Speak ye exceeding bravely concerning the greatness of his sovereignty, how he can create or can destroy. Tell them that "he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy, and he will have compassion on whom he will have compassion." Point to the greatness and

splendour of his love, how he receiveth sinners, how he giveth grace to the graceless, and how his Son in due time died for the ungodly.

I heard it said of a certain preacher by one who was no ill judge, though a simple countryman, "I have heard many preachers, but I never heard one that seemed to make God so great as that man does." I would like to have such praise, or at least, to deserve it; for I think it should be a main object of the preacher to make God great in men's esteem. To-day, my brethren, the most approved preaching makes much of *man*. Philanthropy, which is good enough in its place, has supplanted loyalty to Jehovah: the second table is put before the first, and in that position it genders idolatry—the worship of man, which is only a form of self-adoration. All divinity is now to be shaped according to man, and from man's point of view; and men are to think out their theology, and not take it from God's mouth, or from the Book inspired of the Spirit of God. Men are such wonderful beings in this nineteenth century that we are called upon to tone down the gospel to "the spirit of the age,"—that is, to the fashions and the follies of human thought, as they vary from day to day. This, by God's help, we will never do,—no, not by one diluting drop, nor by the splitting of a hair. What have I to do with suiting the nineteenth century any more than the ninth century? We have to do with the immutable God, and with the fixed verities which he has revealed to us. Having taken our foothold upon the rock, we shall not stir from it, by God's help, while there is breath in our body. Yet so it is; man has made man his god, and Jehovah is dethroned in his thoughts. I believe in God, the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob: if there be another god newly come up, let those worship him who will; but the stern God of the Old Testament, the loving God of the New Testament, it is evermore my resolve to magnify.

Time may come yet when men will hear the old gospel once more; but whether they do or not, I will declare Jehovah's greatness. There are many shifts and changes, but if we stand still, and bide our time, the current which runs this way to-day will set in an opposite direction to-morrow; and if it should not do so, what is that to us? We are not accountable for popular opinion, but only for our own loyalty to truth. He who is faithful to his God, and declares his greatness in this evil time, shall be accepted as a faithful servant in the day of the last account. Of course, he will to-day be stigmatized as "behind the times," and be little esteemed by those who deem themselves cultured and advanced, but of this he may make small account.

Thus I have taken you over two of the sentences. I have shown you an awe-struck people talking together of God's terrible acts, and then the child of God coming in with his personal testimony, saying, "I will declare thy greatness."

III. In the third sentence you see a company of godly people together, and in their talk you mark THE GRATEFUL OUTPOURING of thankful spirits:—"*They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness.*"

The Hebrew word has something to do with bubbling up: it means they shall overflow, they shall gush with the memory of thy great goodness: and in handling this sentence I should like to dwell only upon that metaphor. A Christian man in reference to the goodness of God to him

should resemble a springing well. There should always be fresh matter from him upon that blessed subject—"the memory of thy great goodness." Did you ever tell out the story of your life to anybody to the full? Did you ever write it? I am sometimes not a little amused, certainly not surprised, when I get, as I did this week, a letter upon foolscap, twelve sheets, four-and-twenty pages, all filled up with the story of a man I never saw, who lives far away in the back-woods. Nothing will do but he must tell somebody or other what God has done for him, and he has selected me to be the receiver of the narrative. He has only followed the example of many others. I regret that so many of these autobiographies come to me, for such good things ought to be a little more evenly distributed. I have scarcely the time to get through that length of writing, and having so many other epistles, it is possible that I am not as grateful for this one as I ought to be; but it is a good theme, of which we cannot weary. I would encourage all believers abundantly to utter what they remember of the Lord's love; and if they cannot tell it *viva voce* they must write it. You need not send *me* the manuscript; but do not let it be lost. Tell your friends the happy tale of Jesus and his love.

"Oh, bless the Lord, my soul,
Nor let his mercies lie
Forgotten in unthankfulness,
And without praises die."

I like the instinct (and I think it is always an instinct of a child of God) that makes a man feel, "I must tell what the Lord has done for me."

They shall *abundantly* utter; they shall gush; they shall overflow with the memory of thy great goodness. Now, if somebody could give you all his time to listen to you about what God has done for you, could you not keep on for ever? I was about to blunder, and say I could keep on for ever, and then begin again. I feel like David, when he said that he would praise God's name for ever, and then said "*and ever*," as if he could spend two "for evers" in God's praise. We can never exhaust it. We may tell it for ever, and yet it shall remain untold. It is so fresh, so new, that no fountain can excel it.

See, too, how *freely* a true testimony of holy experience is given out by grateful believers. It is refreshing to yourself to proclaim it. Fountains never grudge their streams: they sparkle and they flash, their crystal diamonds glitter in the sunlight; they are things of beauty, and joys for ever. Even so it is a holy recreation to let our gratitude well up and overflow to the praise of God. Is it not a refreshment to those who come within the sound of it? Oftentimes you might relieve a brother's woe if you told him how God relieved *you*. There may be sitting in your own pew some person with a very heavy heart, whom you could readily relieve if your tongue were not frost-bitten. Oh, that out of the midst of your soul would flow rivers of living water! Child of God, you may be carrying in your bosom that key of Doubting Castle which will open every door, and will not only let you out of it, but your companion in tribulation too, so that the two of you shall come forth and fairly escape from the giant, by the use of the key.

They shall abundantly utter, they shall overflow with the memory of thy great goodness, O Lord. Does not this imply a measure of *con-*

tinuance? Let us *now* praise the Lord. Use your memory at this hour. Go over your life-story. You have not kept a diary. I suppose not, I almost hope not, for such daily records are apt to grow stilted. People feel that they must put something down every day, and perhaps they write the most when they have least to say. But, at any rate, in your memory you ought to retain the recollection of the Lord's deeds of love and grace to you, and you should utter them as they come fresh to your memory at this moment.

Such utterances would help us in reference to the former sentences of the text. When men are speaking of the terrible acts of God with bated breath, then come you in and say, "But he is good. These acts of judgment are few and far between. It is not often that we have a thunderstorm. What soft, bright mornings, what clear days, what dewy evenings we have, and only now and then a tempest!" Tell them of God's great goodness. And when at other times you have declared his greatness, it will be wise to change the strain, and soften down the terror of his grandeur by speaking of the majesty of his love. I do not think you should abundantly utter his terrible acts: you need not abundantly utter his greatness; but you may dwell with peculiar emphasis, freeness, and fulness upon his goodness—his goodness to you. This third round of our ladder is a golden one, and I am loth to leave it, for it is my joy abundantly to utter the memory of the Lord's great goodness to me.

IV. And now, you see, all the while it has been talk, but now in the fourth part we rise a stage higher, for we come to singing. Listen to THE SELECT SONG. "They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and *shall sing of thy righteousness.*"

When good men talk of God they soon find that the tongue leaps with liberty, for the strings that held it are broken. Then they cannot be satisfied with talking to men; they must rise to something better, and talk with God in holy song. "They shall sing." Singing is the language of joy, the special vehicle of praise, the chosen speech of heaven. Singing is language married to music; words winged with melody. Verily the Lord's redeemed may well have much of it, for it every way becomes their state, and their prospects. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord."

But is not this a very singular text? Do you not wonder at the subject of their song? "They shall sing *of thy righteousness.*" You remember in the fifty-first psalm David says, "My tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." That is a strange theme. Why did he not say, "They shall sing of the memory of thy great goodness"? Certainly that is a choice topic for song; but yet the more select, the higher subject for music, is the righteousness of God. Is it not a singular choice? Probably a large part of my audience will not understand how it can be regarded as a joyful subject. The righteousness of God is a theme of terror to many: they wish he were not righteous. He will by no means spare the guilty, but will hold his plummet to every bowing wall and tottering fence, and his hail shall sweep away all the refuges of lies; and because of this men dread the Lord, and turn away from him: and yet, you see, there are hearts that can sing of his righteousness, and who, having other themes, having God's terrible acts,

having God's greatness, having God's goodness to sing of, yet prefer this for their song—"They shall sing of thy righteousness."

What is there to sing about in this?

Before I answer that question, I want you to notice how this subject of God's righteousness is put, and how it is connected. Let me read you the sentence before it, and the sentence afterwards, and you will see how this singing of his righteousness is, so to speak, sandwiched in between two other themes. Look, now:—"They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, *and shall sing of thy righteousness.* The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy." Here are two cakes of honey, and my text is put between them. Here is a blessed supper for you at this hour if you do but know how to feed upon it. Between the two testimonies of goodness and of grace comes in this of righteousness; and I greatly delight in the thought that the great subject of song here is a righteousness which is encompassed about with goodness—a righteousness which does not hinder compassion. This righteousness is surrounded by mercy, and therefore the mercy is not unrighteous, but is strictly just. Oh, friends, the very glory of the gospel is that righteousness and peace have kissed each other in it,—that the sword of justice is not snapped across the knee of mercy, but it is sheathed in the scabbard of the atonement, there to abide in its majestic rest, never to be brought out again to smite a soul for whom Christ hath died! Oh, the joy of getting hold of a righteousness perfectly consistent with the goodness and grace of God!

What is there concerning this righteousness that we are able to sing about? Just let me enlarge upon it for a minute or two. I count it a very great joy to every Christian that God is essentially righteous. What an awful thing it would be to have an unrighteous God! If the heathen who worshipped Jupiter, for instance, had sat down and deliberately studied the character of Jupiter, as taught to them by their own priests, they must have felt it a degrading thing to be under the rule of such a detestable being as Jove was said to be. A licentious God,—fancy that! An unrighteous God, who could do what he pleased, and pleased to do iniquity! What a horror! God in his infinite sovereignty is to be admired, because it is not possible for him in the exercise of his sovereignty to do anything that is unrighteous. No creature of his shall ever have just cause to blame the deeds of the Most High. He doeth as he wills, and he gives no account of what he does, for he has absolute dominion, and none can call him to his bar; but his will is holiness, and justice, and righteousness, and his being is love. I delight to think that I serve a righteous God. An unrighteous God! That were to remove the foundations upon which all things must rest; for, after all, the character of God must be the basis of our confidence. If he were not righteous, what reliance could we place upon him? His promises of grace might be broken; his covenant might be a fiction; the atonement itself might turn out to be a sham, and save nobody, unless the contract involved in it had been made by a righteous God.

He is righteous; let us be sure of it, and sing about it—*righteous in all that he reveals.* There is no revelation of God in the Bible, or anywhere else, that is unrighteous. A man says, "This is revealed to me,

but it is not consistent with the perfect righteousness of God." We know that he sees not the light of God at all, and knows not what he says. There is nothing revealed by God concerning himself and his dealings with men but what is perfectly righteous. "The word of the Lord is pure."

Again, there is nothing *commanded* by him but what is perfectly righteous. He has not commanded sin: he has not in all those ten commands put down a single precept which is contrary to integrity. Everything that he bids us do it is safe to do, for it is right and just. As he is a holy Master, so is his service perfect holiness.

Neither is God unrighteous in his *decrees*. We cannot climb to heaven and turn over those folded leaves, wherein everything that is, and has been, and is yet to be, will be found written by his prescient pen; but there is nothing in those decrees which savours of injustice. We may be sure of that. Nothing could come forth from the heavenly court but that which is perfectly right and just. And this makes us sing: we feel right glad that everything can be trusted with our Lord and King. He shall judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth. Let him do what he wills, and ordain what he pleases; our spirit bows before him, and cries, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good"; for "the Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works," and blessed be his name for ever.

It is the same with God's *doings*. The Lord has never performed an unrighteous act. I want you people of God, especially, to feel this, so that if you have lost anyone very dear to you, you may hold your peace, like Aaron, even if you cannot go further, and bless the Lord in the midst of your trials. Nothing harsh or unduly severe has come from the divine hand. He has not dealt with you according to your deserts; for if he had done so, you would be now where his mercy is clean gone for ever. Beloved, let us feel that this is a settled point, concerning which no question can be raised. Let us have no quarrels with God. I would not merely say that he is righteous to you, his dear people; but more, that he is invariably tender and kind. That surgeon's knife of his does but remove a cancer. That bitter medicine does but heal you of a disease that else would be your death. Therefore, accept all that cometh from God, and kiss the hand that smiteth, and honour the lip which upbraideth.

And here is matter to sing about. The Lord is righteous in all *his judgments*. You may not need this fact at this present, but you may require it in some darker hour, when you lie under a false charge, and your defence is not believed. You have been doing your best in your situation, and you are accused of dishonesty, and you cannot clear yourself: perhaps the circumstantial evidence looks against you, though you are as innocent of the deed as the angels of light. If you have faith enough, you may now sing of the righteousness of God. Some of us have sung of it when everybody has misrepresented us; and we have been sustained thereby. It little matters what men say, for they are not our judges. To our own Master we stand or fall. The Lord is righteous, and we can afford to leave our case in his hands: he will defend the right, and rectify the wrong. If we have acted with single-eyed honesty and uprightness, we may appeal to his court, and calmly abide his decision.

He will execute judgment for the oppressed, and therefore the children of God sing concerning his righteousness.

But the loudest song and the sweetest is concerning *the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus.* He would not, even to save his own elect, do an unjust thing. Even that his mercy might be glorified he would not stain his justice. Forth came his Son, his other self, to take upon himself the nature of man, that man's guilt might be imputed to him, and that he might bear the penalty upon the cross. The cross is at once the loudest proclamation of divine righteousness and the plainest proof of divine love. The Lord is able to save to the uttermost; but he is not able to retract his declaration, "The soul that sinneth it shall die." He must punish, even though he must pardon. It is necessary that the authority of law should be sustained, and therefore the Lord will not withdraw from the execution of justice upon the ungodly though it be his strange work, and he desireth it not. On his Son he has executed justice for all those who are in him. The man Christ Jesus was the federal Head of his own chosen, and he has borne their grief, and carried their sorrows. He has finished their transgression, and made an end of their sin, and brought in for them an everlasting righteousness.

And now at this time I want you to sing of the divine righteousness, because the righteousness of Christ is yours. If you are believers you can joyfully wrap yourselves up in the righteousness of God himself. "This is the name wherewith she shall be called, The Lord our Righteousness." See Jeremiah xxxiii. 16. Notice the feminine: it is not "wherewith *he* shall be called," but "wherewith *she* shall be called." The wife takes the husband's name; the church is named after Christ, her Bridegroom. It is a wonderful sentence to be in God's book—that his church shall bear his name, and Jesus Christ the eternal God shall become the righteousness of poor sinners like ourselves. He is made of God unto us righteousness at this hour. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Let us sing in our hearts concerning that glorious wedding-dress which adorns us at this very moment, and shall adorn us in the day when we enter into the joy of our Lord.

"They shall sing of his righteousness." If you do not sing about the righteousness which God imputes to you, when will you sing?

> "Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
> My beauty are, my glorious dress;
> Midst flaming worlds, in these array'd,
> With joy shall I lift up my head."

But I must close, and I want, therefore, to say to you, dear friends, that I conceive this singing of God's righteousness to be the choicest evidence of real conversion and reconciliation to God, and of likeness to God. If we were more sanctified we should be less tempted to cavil at the righteousness of God. Here is a man who takes down his Bible, and he reads, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." "Can't bear it," says he. It is because you do not know the mind of God fully, or else, terrible as it is, you would say, "It must be right if God determines it." Instead of that the man assumes to judge God,

and dares to weigh the Word of God in his scales, and say, "This does not suit my inner consciousness, and therefore it is wrong." Is our inner consciousness infallible? Is revelation a nose of wax to be shaped by our inner whimsies? When a man once alters the Word of God a little, within a year he alters it again. I have noticed brethren who began their wanderings from orthodoxy with the life-in-Christ theory, who have now reached the restitution of all things, devils included. Why preachers who believe this last theory keep on preaching I do not know, for there is no practical reason why they should. If what they say is untrue, they had better hold their tongues; and if what they say is true, their occupation is gone; for clearly it is only a matter of time, and everybody will come right. Let people swear, and live as they like, what difference can it make, if in a short time they will all be restored? As well be wicked as righteous, since in the long run one shall be as the other. I see how it is. God's Word is nothing: these new notions are everything. The modern men blot out what they like, and tear out what they please from the Book; or they lay the Book aside altogether; for they themselves make their own Bible, and every man is his own inspiration, and will ere long proclaim himself to be his own god. But when the soul is brought to know God, it does not question his Word or his doings any longer. It sits down before a great mystery, and cries, "I do not understand this: I cannot measure it. Oh, the depths! But what God says I believe. What God does I accept." Brethren, let me not deceive you by pandering to the idle prattle of the times. Men dream, and then assert that their visions are truth. If there be anything of conjecture and of "larger hope," so be it. I may conjecture, and I may imagine; but for me to preach my conjectures and my imaginations as doctrines would be damnable. It is an atrocious disloyalty to the majesty of revelation to add to it the maunderings of our poor fallible judgments. The better thing is always to feel as a little child at his father's knee, when we are reading the Scriptures; and to ask to be taught of the Spirit. Whatever the truth may be, I shall never quarrel with God. However terrible his acts, if I am unable to rejoice in the light of his face, yet in the shadow of his wings will I rejoice. When he seems to spread that great wing, and hide the sun, I will go and nestle beneath him, and cry, "It is the Lord, and it must be right." Paul was wont to silence those who had objections to offer concerning the ways of the Lord: he did not argue, but he simply said, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" "Bad argument," modern thinkers dare to say. Yet it is the best that such people deserve, and the best that inspiration deigns to offer them. The cricket on the hearth is not to be debated with when it questions the sun for shining, or the thunders for having a voice louder than its own.

My brethren, say each one of you unto the Lord, "I will sing of thy righteousness." It is an awful truth! It is a truth that makes me tremble as I utter it; but I do read in the Revelation, concerning those that are tormented day and night, that it is "in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb." Whatever that torment may be, it must be right. Nothing in the presence of the angels of God can be contrary to their joy over repenting sinners,—nothing in the

presence of the Lamb can be contrary to his ineffable love. The Lord shall judge the world by that same Jesus who came into the world that the world by him might be saved. Love will inflict the sentence of justice. Nothing with regard to the future of the impenitent can come from God but that which will be supremely righteous. It is not for us to explain to others, or even to understand for ourselves, all that the Lord does or is; but it is our duty as his subjects, our pleasure as his children, to bow before him and adore. Oh, eternal God, I do not understand thee! If I could comprehend thee thou wert not God, or I not man. The parts of thy ways which thou hast revealed stagger and almost slay me, but, as I fall at thy feet as dead, my heart cries, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." For the Lord is good, and righteous are all his ways. Hallelujah, though the world should perish! Hallelujah, though my soul should die with fear! The Lord for ever shall be extolled. My hearer, when you speak thus from your heart, you are a converted man. There is no mistake about it: you are reconciled to God, indeed, when you thus honour him. Alas, many are only reconciled to the half of God, or to the tenth part of God! Indeed, I fear that many have shaped a god for themselves, and so are not reconciled to the true God at all. We want a conversion which shall make us run in parallel lines with the God who has revealed himself by his prophets and apostles, and by his ever-to-be-adored Son. So may it be with each one of us, for Jesus's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxlv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—179, 245,116 (Song I.)

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—Nothing has happened to throw me back, and I judge myself to be restored in bodily health, and to be gradually recovering physical strength. The mind also is renewing its youth, and the spirits are returning to their proper height. For all this I am intensely grateful, and I am most hopefully looking forward to return to labour under the divine blessing. If I could also obtain a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit, in answer to your prayers, it would be a far greater boon than even life itself. This age needs the gospel in its purity and power. Oh for help so to proclaim it that it might conquer all hearts! Jesus is dishonoured by a teaching which evaporates the essential meaning from every doctrine, and leaves nothing but the husks of rationalism. May the Lord glorify his own Son by vindicating the gospel of his grace in the consciences of men! So prays

Yours in the eternal truth,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, March 8, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SINGULAR ORIGIN OF A CHRISTIAN MAN.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 22ND, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON FEBRUARY 7TH, 1884.

"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."—Ephesians ii. 10.

THIS text is written by the apostle as a reason why salvation cannot be a thing of human merit: "not of works, lest any man should boast, for we are his workmanship." The *for* indicates an argument. It is a conclusive reason why salvation cannot be by our good works, because even when we have an abundance of the best of works, they are far more due to God than to ourselves. We ourselves, in our saved condition, are the workmanship of God, and with each of us the argument holds good,—"Not of works, for we are his workmanship."

We are so completely the Lord's workmanship, that we are also styled a creation. We are "created in Christ Jesus," and a creation cannot possibly be the creature's own work; such a supposition would be absurd upon the face of it. It would be a misuse of language to speak of anything as creating itself. Whatever, therefore, we are in Christ Jesus is the result of God's work upon us, and cannot be the cause of that work.

Moreover, our good works, be they what they may, are the subjects of an ordinance of God:—"which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Truly they are purposed by ourselves, and our will and heart determine them; but far at the back of all this lies the divine purpose by which they were settled from of old. If good works are ordained, as well as the salvation of which they are the evidence, then the whole matter is of divine ordaining, and there is no space left to impute salvation to human works. The tree is not created by its fruit, for the fruit is created with the tree, and is one purpose for which the tree was created. Good works are not the cause of salvation, for they are the result of it, and were contemplated as a result by God when he saved us. The argument deserves to be worked out at greater length, but we have not space for it now.

I want, at this time, to call your attention to four things in the text; and if you can carry in your mind's eye the first creation, and the

making of Adam, and what he was made for, and where he was put when he was made, it will serve as a background to the picture of the second creation, which I shall attempt to paint. I would dwell upon man as God's workmanship in a still higher sense than by his first making. I would set him forth as created anew "unto good works, which God hath before *prepared*,"—for that is the word properly used in the new translation—"which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them."

I. To begin, then; notice first, THE SINGULAR ORIGIN OF A CHRISTIAN MAN,—of all Christian men, whether Jews or Gentiles; of all Christian men, even if they be the highest apostles, like Paul, or the least of all the family of love, such as we may be. As many as are truly saved, and brought into union with Christ, are the workmanship of God.

No Christian in the world is a chance production of nature, or the outcome of evolution, or the result of special circumstances. "By the grace of God I am what I am," may be said by every man who is saved. To nothing can we ascribe the fact that we are in Christ except this—that we are God's workmanship. Of regeneration we must say once for all, "This is the finger of God."

The spiritual life cannot come to us by development from our old nature. I have heard a great deal about evolution and development, but I am afraid that if any one of us were to be developed to our utmost, apart from the grace of God, we should come out worse than before the development began. Our flesh would be apt to produce by evolution something exceedingly brutish and devilish. Mr. Whitefield once raised a great outcry against himself by saying that man by nature was half beast and half devil: I have never seen any reason why the description should be altered; but I have sometimes wondered which was the worse of the two—the devil in the man, or the beast in him.

As to spiritual life coming out of our unrenewed nature, it is impossible. "Out of nothing comes nothing." There is no spiritual life in men dead in trespasses and sins; how then can life come out of them? Out of death truly there comes a something congruous thereto: horrible are the forms of corruption that arise from the body in which death holds sway; but this is dissolution and destruction, and not life. What the corruption of a human soul may be, I cannot attempt to say. Terrible as hell must be, there is nothing in the pit more awful than those who are in it. The lost themselves are more unutterably dreadful than any punishment that justice may have imposed upon them. Developed manhood, developed without any restraining influences, if it be shut up in vast numbers, must be a fermenting mass of hate, envy, malice, lust, cruelty, and pride. Speak of evolution,—here it is,—"When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." Darkness never begets light, filth never creates purity, hell never yields heaven, and depravity never produces grace.

But the point is that we are God's workmanship. *We are his workmanship from the very first.* The first stroke that helps to fashion us into Christians comes from the Lord's own hand. He marks the stone while yet in the quarry, cuts it from its natural bed, and performs the first hewing and squaring, even as it is he who afterwards exercises the sculptor's skill upon it. It was the Lord who first taught us our need

of a Saviour, and gave us our sense of sin, and our early tremblings, and our new desires. The faintest breath of spiritual life that was ever breathed by any one of us, came from God himself. We might almost use the same words concerning our new nature as the Psalmist used when he spoke of his body,—"Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

We shall remain the Lord's workmanship to the very last. The picture must be finished by that same Master-hand which first sketched it. If any other hand should lay so much as a tint or colour thereupon, it would certainly mar it all. God has commenced the character of his people after so marvellous a sort that no human mind as yet fully comprehends the full design of infinite love, for none know perfectly the matchless character of Jesus, our Lord. "It doth not yet appear what we shall be." Since, then, we do not even know what we are to be, we cannot intrude into the work, and take the pencil from the hand of the great Artist, and complete his design, but the Author must be the Finisher of what he has begun.

This is very beautiful to remember, and *it should stir up all that is within us to magnify the Lord.* If it be so, that from the first the Lord has wrought all our works in us, what an amount of patience, what an amount of power, what an amount of skill, what an amount of love, what an amount of grace, has God spent upon us hitherto! I was surprised when I was told, the other day, by a friend, who was a maker of steel-plate engravings, how much of labour had to be put into a finely-executed engraving. Think of the power that has cut lines of beauty in such steel as we are! Think of the patience that lent its arm, and its eye, and its heart, and its infinite mind, to the carrying on of the supreme work of producing the image of Christ in those who were born in sin! Think of the skill which makes heirs of God out of heirs of wrath! It seemed impossible when one said that "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham," but it is more than fulfilled in us. Miracles of grace have been wrought upon us as many as the sands on the sea-shore. How graciously has the Lord endured our opposition to his gracious operations; never violating the freedom of our will, but making us willing in the day of his power! This is one of the greatest of the marvels. See how he has continued to work upon us, year after year, with final perseverance of undiminished love! How much more of power will still be needed, and how much more of long-suffering, and how much more of careful wisdom, ere we shall be perfect and complete! According to his riches in grace will he deal with us; and if that should not suffice, he will take a higher standard, and treat us "according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." This we know, that we shall certainly receive all that is needed for completion, for he that hath begun a good work in us will perform it unto the day of Christ. Happy is it for us that "we are his workmanship"!

Now, ought we not, dear friends, as far as the Lord has gone with us already, to bless and praise his holy name? Do you not think that it is becoming in all of us, who know that God has been at work with us, to adore him continually for what he has done? I know you sigh because

a part of the picture still looks rough and incomplete. Consider that the Artist has not ended his labour upon that portion of us. Sanctification in its practical issues is not yet ended. But do not sigh so much over the incomplete part as to fail in rejoicing over that which is accomplished. Rejoice that a hand has been laid upon the canvas which is matchless even in its outlines, and foundation-colours; a hand, moreover, which was never yet known to throw away a canvas upon which it had once commenced a masterpiece. Remember that thou magnify his work. "He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit."

One thing I would say to you who are God's people: if we are his workmanship, never let us be ashamed to let men see God's workmanship in us. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Let us be very much ashamed to let them see the remains of the devil's workmanship in us; hide it behind a veil of repentant grief. Christ has come to destroy it; let it be destroyed. Yet let your simple faith be known and spoken of, even though it be ridiculed by the wise men of the age, who by wisdom know not God. Do not be ashamed of your confidence in your God at any time, even though men burst into a fit of laughter over it as if you must be raving mad; for this also is God's workmanship. Nothing that God has wrought is unfit to be seen. Search from the summit of the highest Alp to the bottom of the deepest cavern, and there is neither plant, nor beast, nor insect, nor even grain of dust which is not beautiful in its season. I have heard foolish people half scream at the sight of some poor little insect, or frog, or lizard; but this is from want of knowing more of the beauty of the creatures which our great Father has formed. If these are quietly looked at, especially if they are examined under the microscope, they amaze us with the marvellous art displayed in them. Nothing that God has made should be despised. Assuredly this is most true in the spiritual kingdom, where the lowest form of grace is lovely as an angel's countenance. All the new creatures of God are surpassingly beautiful; and so far as you, my brother, are God's workmanship, so far you are comely with the comeliness which he has put upon you. See how the Bridegroom in Solomon's Song extols his Bride, fair metaphor of the manner in which the Lord Jesus praises his church. He is an impartial Judge of all that is excellent; but when he views his people as God's work, he is full of admiration. That which is your own work, you may well blush to own; that which is the devil's work, you are bound to detest; but that which is the work of the Holy Ghost in you, will bear inspection, and no guilty fear should cause you to conceal it. Let your meekness, your kindness, your uprightness, your truth, your purity appear unto all men. Never let it be a question whether you are a Christian. Do not tremble at the persecution which the enmity of the ungodly may inflict upon you because you belong to Christ, but the rather accept it as an honour, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.

As to any of you who hear me at this time, and feel forced to say, "Ah, me! I do not see how I am to be a Christian"; let me speak with you. I am thinking of the matter very differently. I see very plainly how

you can become Christians; for all of us who are believers are God's workmanship, and that God who has made *us* his workmanship can make you to be the same. "Oh, but I cannot do anything!" Who said you could? Who asked you to do any part of God's work? We are God's workmanship. There is in your fallen nature no power or will towards good, and if the question were about *your* workmanship, the answer would be full of despair; but while God works there is hope.

"Oh, but I have a withered hand!" When Jesus bids you stretch it out, do not enquire about your own power, but look to his power who gives the command. Do not say, "I cannot save myself. I cannot make myself holy." Look you, then, to him who is a Saviour, able to save to the uttermost, who was born for this end, that he might save his people from their sins. "We are *his* workmanship," cry all the saints: do you want to be your own workmanship? He that can work upon one can work upon another. Oh, that you would lie at his feet! Oh, that you would put off all idea of what *you* can do for yourself, and draw comfort from these few words of my text: "We are his workmanship"! What is there that God cannot do for you? Rough material as you are, he can make you what you should be; he can make you what it will delight you to be. God grant that we may learn to look to the strong for strength, and no longer waste our time in enquiring for it where there is nothing but perfect weakness!

Here, then, is the origin of a Christian man: he comes out of the workshop of God.

II. Secondly, here in the text we see THE PECULIAR MANNER OF THIS ORIGIN. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus." "Created in Christ Jesus." Catch that thought. Our new life is a creation. This goes further than the former expression; for workmanship is less than creation. A man may produce a picture, and say, "This is my workmanship": a piece of mosaic, or a vessel fresh from the wheel, may be a man's workmanship, but it is not his creation. The artist must procure his canvas and his colours, the maker of a mosaic must find his marbles or his wood, the potter must dig his clay, for without these materials he can do nothing; for he is not the Creator. To One only does that august name strictly belong. None other could create a gnat, or the beam of light in which it dances, or the eye with which it is seen. In this world of grace, wherever we live, we are a creation. Our new life is as truly *created out of nothing* as were the first heavens, and the first earth. This ought to be particularly noticed, for there are some who think that the grace of God improves the old nature into the new. It does nothing of the sort. That which we possess since the fall is corrupt and dead, and has to be buried, whereof our baptism is the type and the testimony. That which is of God within us is a new birth, a divine principle, a living seed, a quickening spirit; in fact, it is a creation: we are new creatures in Christ Jesus. What a sweeping statement! This goes back to the very beginning of grace within us. As we read, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," so may we say of every man that is born again unto God, that he had no true beginning till God created him, and made him spiritually to be. Creation is the calling of something out of nothing, of light out of darkness, of life out of death. Is not this a fair des-

cription of the new birth? Has not this happened to us? When we were nothing, God, in the greatness of his grace, created us in Christ Jesus.

Creation was *effected by a word.* "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made." "He spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast." "God said, Let there be light: and there was light." Is not that again an accurate description of our entrance into spiritual light and life? Do we not confess, "Thy word hath quickened me"? "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." The Lord breathed upon us by his Spirit, and we lived; he spake, and we were created in Christ Jesus.

In creation *the Lord was alone and unaided.* The prophet asks, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?" After all was done, the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy; but they did not—could not, aid in the work. Creation is the prerogative of Jehovah, and none can share it with him. So it is in the regeneration of a soul; instrumentality appears, but the real work is immediately of the Spirit of God.

See, then, poor sinners who may hear these words, that they have a relation to you. You are saying, "How can we become Christians?" Why, you can become Christians by being created, and there is no other way. "But we cannot create ourselves," says one. It is even so. Stand back, and quit all pretence of being creators; and the further you retreat from self-conceit the better, for it is God who must create you. How I wish that you felt this! "It would drive us to despair," say you. It might drive you to such despair as would be the means of your flying to Christ, and that is precisely what I desire. It would be greatly to your gain if you never again indulged a shred of hope in your own works, and were forced to accept the grace of God. I seek not to excite in you a proud activity, but a humble reliance in the mercy of God, and a submissive acceptance of his plan of salvation by free grace. Oh, that this might be done! The gospel does not call upon you to save yourselves; but its voice is the echo of that of the Lord in Isaiah xlv. 22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else." The Lord does not even ask your help in your own salvation. When he has wrought in you, you may work it out, but that is all. Be ready to be as clay in the hands of the potter, plastic to the touch of the All-creating God, and you shall find that he is the God of salvation, and to him belong the issues from death. Out of black sinners he can make bright saints. Hearts of stone he can take away, and give hearts of flesh. He can take the infidel, and create in him a mighty faith; the harlot, and make her a pattern of purity; the lowest of the low, and the vilest of the vile, and put them among the princes—even the princes of his people. Granted that a Christian is the result of a creation, then nothing is wanted to begin with, and no help is required in the process; the Lord can work, and none can

hinder him. This truth lifts the whole matter out of the region of the creature's merit, worth, or ability, and puts it on another footing, full of hope to man, and of glory to God. I would be glad and rejoice for ever in that which God creates: it fills me with comfort for my fellow-men, and with reverence for my God.

But the text speaks of this creation as "in Christ Jesus." This is a deeply instructive subject, which at this present cannot fully be discussed, partly from want of time, and partly from want of ability on my part fully to open it up. It would require a series of discourses, such as Dr. John Owen, or Stephen Charnock might have been able to deliver; the theologians of to-day, if there be any, cannot come near it. Herein is a great deep:—"created in Christ Jesus." This much, however, I may note, for it rises to the surface: in the first creation you and I were created in Adam. We wear the image of the earthly Adam by our natural descent, and as such we are the creatures of God. It is of our natural birth that the Psalmist said, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me." Thus we received our being, and that is a blessing; but the blessing would have soured into a curse had not Jesus come to work our well-being. Creation in the first Adam has brought us into a world of misery, and to reach a better world we require to be created in some such fashion that we come into union, and connection, and relationship with the second Adam, the Lord from heaven. This is what the Lord does when he new-creates each believer; he creates him in Christ Jesus. The Lord Jesus is his federal Head, and his Representative; his hope is hidden in him. We are thus put under a new economy, and are dealt with under a new system and order of things. I could tell you something more that I do believe, namely, that when the glorious Jehovah created the Christ, as the Man Christ Jesus, and when the Godhead came into union with this human nature of our blessed Lord, all of us were viewed as in him. What saith the Lord? "In thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." That God saw you, and me, and all the redeemed in Christ from all eternity, is matter of faith to me; and we were in Christ when he died, in him when he rose, and we are in him even now that he sitteth at the right hand of God, even the Father. Who can separate the Head from the members, or the members from the Head? We are regarded as one in the thought and acts of Jehovah. Beloved, there is a mystic unity between Christ and the twice-born, into which I will not further go. I point to a casket which just now I will not unlock. But to return to the text, here is the glory of it: first, we are God's workmanship, and the peculiar manner in which we have been created is that we have been created "in Christ Jesus."

III. We come, thirdly, to dwell upon THE SPECIAL OBJECT OF THIS CREATION: "unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

When Adam was created, the Lord made him for his own glory. This ever was, and is, and must be the chief end of man. As soon as he was created, the Lord placed Adam in the garden, and what did he give him to do? "He had only to enjoy himself," says one. I do not read such a statement in the Scriptures. "He put him there," says

another, "that he might eat of every fruit that grew in the garden." Truly he did permit him freely to partake of all that nature yielded, but he tells us himself that he put him in the garden "to dress it, and to keep it." Occupation was found him which would keep him always busy. A gardener's business is healthful and interesting, but it offers no temptation to idleness, for every season has its demands; and if the work is not kept well under, it is hard to overtake it again. That noble man, who was the founder of our race, trimmed the vine, and trained the tree, uprooted the weed, and planted the herb. Paradise itself required to make it perfect that a man should have something to do. Slavish drudgery involved by unreasonable hours is not of God, but of the cruel greed of man; ill-remunerated toil, by which the worker cannot earn his daily bread, is the result of human tyranny, not of divine purpose; but a fair share of healthy, useful labour is needful for us all, and if ever this world becomes a paradise again, we shall have each one of us to pay either the sweat of our brow or of our brain as the price of our bread.

When the Lord creates us the second time, in the second Adam, he does not make us that we may be merely comfortable and happy. We may enjoy all that God has given us, for of every tree of this garden you may freely eat, since in the paradise into which Christ has introduced you there is no forbidden fruit. You may eat and drink abundantly of heavenly food, but you are not created anew with so poor a purpose as your pleasure only. Around you is the garden of the Lord, and your call is that you may dress it, and keep it. Cultivate it within; guard it from foes without. Holy labours await you, good works are expected of you, and you were created in Christ Jesus on purpose that you might be zealous for them. To you the great Father says, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." He who died for you calls you to do works like his own. The Holy Spirit within you prompts you to consecration, urges you to diligence.

And what are good works? In that question lies another large subject. Tell me, ye who talk so much of good works, what are they? I should say that they are works such as God commands—*works of obedience.* When we heartily keep the divine precepts, we must be right; for it can never be evil for a man to do what God bids him.

Next, I should say that they are *works of love;* of love to God, and love to man; works done out of a pure affection to the great Father, and out of unselfish regard to men. That which we do to display our own liberality is done unto self, and so is spoiled; but where there is a single eye to God's glory, the work is good. Works done out of love to Christ, and love to saints, and love to the poor, and love to lost sinners, are good works.

Furthermore, I should say that *works of faith* are good works; works done in confidence in God, undertaken in reliance upon his help, and in the firm belief that he will accept them even though men might censure them. The proclamation of his gospel with faith in its power, the pleading of the promise with expectation of its fulfilment, the sacrifice of personal gain for the service of truth,—works such as these are good, and pleasing to God; for without faith it is impossible to please him.

I am bound to add that good works include the necessary *acts of common life* when they are rightly performed. We are to produce good works in our home, in our shop, in our work-room, in our travel abroad, or on our sick-bed: everywhere we are to be filled with good works to God's glory. All our works should be good works, and we may make them so by sanctifying them with the Word of God and prayer, according to that precept, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

Observe that God has not created us that we may *talk* about our good works, but that we may *walk in them*. Practical doing is better than loud boasting. God has not created us that we may occasionally perform good works, but that we may walk in them—that they may be so habitual to us that the common course of our conversation may be full of them. God has not created us that we may execute good works as a grand performance, but that we may walk in them; not that we may jump up to them, or seem to be walking on stilts, and making a great display every now and then; but that easily, naturally, out of a fully renewed heart, our new-created spirit may display itself in good works. God grant that his holy object may be carried out in us to such a degree that our path may be luminous with holiness, that we may leave behind a shining track, like that of a vessel upon the sea! Oh, that our way may be strewn with gracious acts, as when a cloud passes over a thirsty land, and blesses it with silver showers! I have known in a certain village a spot called "The Poet's Walk," and another called "The Lovers' Walk." Oh, that ours may be "The Christian's Walk"! May the good Lord perfect us in every good work to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight!

IV. And now I close with this last head. Fourthly, THE REMARKABLE PREPARATION MADE FOR THAT OBJECT, for so the text may be rendered, "which God hath prepared that we should walk in them."

God has decreed the salvation of his people; but do not accept that statement as it is at times delivered, but clearly understand what it means. The Lord has decreed everything, and he has as much *decreed the holy lives of his people* as he has decreed their ultimate glorification with him in heaven. Concerning good works, "he hath before ordained that we should walk in them." If God has really and of a truth met with you in a way of grace, and worked upon you by his Spirit, and new-created you, then take it for certain that you are ordained to be a prayerful, godly, upright, sanctified man. The purpose is one and indivisible: there is no ordination to salvation apart from sanctification. The Lord has not ordained any man to eternal life with the proviso that he may continue in sin. Nay, but he has ordained him that he shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and then shall forsake his evil ways, and walk in good works until that walk shall end in perfection before the eternal throne. Understand, then, that the walk of a Christian man is predestinated of God, as much as the safety of a Christian; and so we, whom he has predestinated, are as eager to fulfil our holy destiny here as to enjoy our heavenly destiny hereafter. Foreordination to holiness is indissolubly joined to foreordination to happiness. Note *that*. Thus, in the eternal purpose due provision is made for the good works of believers.

But, next, God has *personally prepared every Christian for good works.* "Oh," say some, "I sometimes feel as if I was so unfit for God's service." You are not unfit, so far as you are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works. When God creates a bird to fly, it is the best flying-machine that can be manufactured; indeed, none can equal it. If God creates worms to plough the soil, and bring up the more useful ingredients to the surface, they are the best fertilizers under heaven. God's purpose is subserved by that which he makes, else were he an unwise worker. We are in a special degree God's workmanship, created to this end, that we may produce good works; and we are fitted to that end as much as a bird is fitted to fly, or a worm is fitted for its purpose in the earth.

"Oh," says one, "but I find it so difficult to walk in good works." Then you are not your true and real self. Pray God to put the flesh back, and to let that dead and carnal part of you be gone; and ask that the new life, which he has infused, may have good scope to carry out its own natural instincts; for it is a holy thing, created on purpose to walk in good works, and it will do so if it be not hindered. Give it liberty. Give it opportunity. Feed it. Bring it before God to strengthen it; and it must, it will, as certainly produce good works as a good tree brings forth good fruit. Spontaneous holiness comes forth from sincere piety. A pure fountain yields clear streams, it cannot do otherwise. The new nature cannot sin because it is born of God. He that hath a clean heart will necessarily have clean hands. An impure sea casts up mire and dirt, but the river of the water of life, when it overflows its banks, deposits no mud, but leaves sand of gold behind it.

Once more, observe with content that *everything around you is arranged for the production of good works in you.* "I do not see that," says one. But listen. When God made Adam, when did he make him? He did not create him till he had made a place for him to live in. The great Father's dear child could not be created until the garden had its roses blooming and its fruits ripening for him, that he might be delighted therewith. When the Lord God created you in Christ Jesus, as you believe he did, he had prepared for you a position of service and usefulness, exactly fitted for your capacity. That place for the present is the position which you now occupy. "No," says one, "but I am in the place of poverty." That is it: it is God's design that you may in that place produce the sweet fruits of contentment and patience. "Alas!" cries another, "I dwell among the ungodly." It is intended by your Lord that your light may shine among them, and that you, having your graces tried, may become all the stronger and the better man. "Oh," says one, "I am a Christian, but I believe that I am in the worst place that ever was. I am alone, like a plant in the desert." Is it not written, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose"? Full often the most advantageous place for our manhood is that which is surrounded with splendid difficulties. A soldier is trained by battles, and a mariner by storms. What can a man do when he has everything to his hand? Everything is possible to him, but so it is to every simpleton. He is truly a man who has nothing to assist him, and yet is aided by the opposition which confronts him. To sail against wind and

tide would be more notable than to drift with gale and current. Is not he a true man who can turn to account the worst possible circumstances so as to produce the best possible results? He has an opportunity for distinguishing himself who is placed amid temptations and perils. In your life, good works are provided for,—"God hath before prepared that we should walk in them."

On the whole, you are placed in the best position for your producing good works to the glory of God. "I do not think it," says one. Very well. Then you will worry to quit your position, and attain another footing; mind that you do not plunge into a worse. The wise man saith, "as a bird that wandereth from her nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place." It is not the box that makes the jewel, nor the place that makes the man. "Oh, but anywhere rather than this!" Yes, and when you get into the place you now covet, you will pine to be back again. A barren tree is none the better for being transplanted. A blind man may stand at many windows before he will improve his view. If it is difficult to produce good works where you are, you will find it still difficult where you wish to be. He who said that he leaped so many yards at Rhodes, was asked to do the same feat at home; surely the place could not take away his strength, nor give it to him.

Oh, sirs, the real difficulty lies not without you, but within you. If you get more grace, and are more fully God's workmanship, you can glorify him in Babylon as well as in Jerusalem. Were you placed within the purlieus of perdition, you would glorify God if God has sanctified you. If you were called to walk through Pandemonium, you would startle it with a message from the Most High if the Spirit of God be truly within you. Your present possibilities are the best for this present; use them as they fly. At any rate, rest assured that divine wisdom has not only prepared you for the hour, but the hour for you. All things are in a divine sense your friends; "For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee."

Moreover, *the Lord has prepared the whole system of his grace to this end*—that you should abound in good works. Every part and portion of the economy of grace tends toward this result, that thou mayest be perfect even as thy Father which is in heaven is perfect. I long to be holy; the Holy Spirit is given to be my Sanctifier. I desire to live near to God; the Holy Spirit dwells in me, and this is nearness of the highest order. Did I hear you sigh—"I pine to know more of God"? This precious Book is in your hand, and its Author is among us, ready to expound it to you. "Oh, but I agonize to conquer sin!" This is not denied you, for it is written, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." Another says, "I yearn to be more like Christ." You are taken into communion with Christ on purpose that this may be. Looking at him you are changed into his image, from glory unto glory. Everything needful for your holiness is to your hand in the covenant of grace. All the helps that you need in your pilgrim way are already placed along the sacred road. The Lord, in the Scriptural sense of the word, "*prevents*" you with the blessings of his goodness. All events, whether terrible or joyous, shall be made to work together for this highest form of good, namely, your sanctification. January's snow, February's cold,

April showers, March winds, and July suns, all co-operate to prepare the wheat for the garner; and all earthly changes are sent of God to ripen us for the eternal future. Yes, I may even say that the glories of heaven call us to a sublime life of holiness, and the thunders of hell urge us to conquer the temptations which are in the world through lust. The crown which Christ holds over our heads inspires us with ardour in our race; while the cross on which he died stirs us to a fervent enthusiasm for his praise. Nothing in heaven, or on earth, or in hell, rightly used, will excuse us in lukewarmness, but everything will impel us to intense zeal for holiness. Even the sin, which so sadly abounds around us, should make us the more watchful and careful in life. When dung is laid to the roots of the vine, it is not thereby defiled, but even out of the foul decay it finds nutriment wherewith to swell its delicious clusters; thus, even the wickedness of man, by driving us nearer to our God, should prove a motive-power for producing more exemplary lives in the midst of an untoward generation. Oh, sirs, if God calls you his workmanship, take care that none can justly find fault with the Worker! If you be indeed God's creation in Christ Jesus, take care that none despise the second birth, or the second Adam. And if it be so, that the Lord has afore prepared all things that we may walk in good works, let us get into gear with creation; let us be in harmony with providence; let us keep step with the march of God's purpose. What more shall I say? I will only breathe a wish. Oh, that you who have not yet believed in my Lord Jesus would do so now; for "to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name"! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Ephesians ii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—181, 237, 222.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—I shall be right glad when the weekly sermon will be that preached in my own pulpit on the previous Sabbath; and I hope that such will be the case in two or three weeks. Still I think the present sermon is somewhat better than those of an ordinary Sunday morning; certainly I enjoyed it much in preparing it for the press, and I send it forth very hopefully, believing that God will feed his people thereby.

I cannot say that I am quite well, but I am progressing upon the whole, and feel much rested and refreshed. Pray that I may soon get to work; and may do so under a double anointing of the Spirit of God.

I heartily thank some few friends who have sent help to Evangelists and Colportage, and I would not forget those who mean to do so soon.

Yours ever heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, March 14th, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ALL OR NONE; OR, COMPROMISES REFUSED: A SERMON WITH FIVE TEXTS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MARCH 29TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON NOVEMBER 25TH, 1883.

I SHALL have five texts—one of them a good one, the other four bad. The first text is good. It is God's text. Exodus x. 26:—"*There shall not an hoof be left behind.*" That is God's text, and the whole sermon will illustrate it by exposing the compromises with which it was met.

The other four are Pharaoh's texts, or, if you like, the devil's, for that is exactly what the devil says to men. Exodus viii. 25:—"*Pharaoh called for Moses and for Aaron, and said, Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.*" That is his first proposal. Then we find him saying at the twenty-eighth verse, "*I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away.*" That is the second of his compromises. In the tenth chapter, at the eighth verse, you have the third. He said to them, "*Go, serve the Lord your God: but who are they that shall go?*" Adding, "*Go now, ye that are men, and serve the Lord.*" And Pharaoh's fourth and last proposal is in the twenty-fourth verse of that same tenth chapter:—"*Pharaoh called unto Moses, and said, Only let your flocks and your herds be stayed.*"

Satan is very loth to give up his hold on men. He is quite as loth as Pharaoh, and he must be driven to it by force of arms; I mean by force of divine grace, before he will let God's people go. Having once got them under his power through the fall, through their sin, and through their obduracy of heart, he will not lose his subjects if he can help it; but he will put forth all his craft, and all his strength, if possible to hold them in his accursed sway. Many of Satan's slaves altogether disregard the voice of God. For them there are no Sabbaths, no Bibles, no religion. Practically they say, "Who is Jehovah that we should obey his voice?" Now, when God means to save men—when the eternal purpose so runs, and the divine determination is to be accomplished, he soon puts an end to this. For some reason quite unknown to the man—it may be quite unguessed by him—he feels

uneasy: he is disturbed. He thinks one morning that he will go up to a place of worship; not that he cares much about it, but he thinks that he shall perhaps be a little easier there. He takes his Bible: he begins to read a chapter. A very striking passage comes before his eye. He is not more easy, for the text has fixed upon him. Like a barbed shaft it has stuck into his soul, and he cannot possibly draw it out again. He is more troubled than ever. He begins to enquire a little about the things of God; there is some respect now outwardly to religion; the man is considerably changed.

But do not imagine that the work is accomplished. Our blessed Master has to fight for every inch of ground which he wins in human hearts. With the matchless artillery of his love he drives the enemy back farther and farther, till at last he conquers; but it is often a long and slow process, and were he not possessed of infinite patience he would give it up. But where it is his resolve that a man shall come out of the world and shall be saved, that resolve must and will be carried into effect; and the man, though he is only brought so far that he begins to think a little about divine truth and about eternal matters, will have to go a great deal farther than that.

You see him sitting under the word of God, and perhaps Satan says now, "Well, you are a fine fellow. You are beginning to occupy a seat Sunday after Sunday in the house of prayer. You have given up your evil habits to a large extent. You are quite a different man. Now you have done something very pleasing to God. You may rest content with this." And it is a very sad thing when men do rest content with such a paltry hope as can have come out of poor performances like these. But still they will stop just there if they can, for Satan does not mind where he makes men halt so long as they will stay under the dominion of sin, and refuse to come to Christ.

Now the Lord begins to deal with the man perhaps in a way of affliction and trouble. His wife sickens: a child dies: he is himself unhealthy: he fears he is about to die, and his fancied righteousness evaporates before his eyes; and he thinks that now surely he must seek after something better. Then will Satan come in and say, "There is time enough yet. Do not be in too much of a hurry."

If the Lord drives a man from that by the solemn movements of the Spirit upon his soul, then the devil will say to him, "How do you know that this is all true?" and he has not to go far before he finds infidels to help his unbelief. I am sorry to say that he can find them in the pulpit pretty plentifully, preaching their infidelities as "advanced thought"; and so poor souls get bewildered, and scarcely know their right hand from their left, and they begin again to relapse into a condition of indifference, and remain where they were.

Blessed be God, if he means to save such, he will, by push of pike, and point of bayonet, carry the day. They shall not rest where they are. The right hand of the Lord is stretched out still, and he will make the Pharaoh of evil yet know that Jehovah is stronger than he. Grace is mightier than nature, and the eternal purpose more sure of fulfilment than all the resolves of case-hardened consciences; so at last it comes to this—that the man is driven to yield to God, and when he is driven to that point Satan comes in again with his compromises.

We are going to speak about these four compromises to-night. The first compromise is found in the eighth chapter at the twenty-fifth verse.

"*Sacrifice to your God in the land.*"

"Yes," says the devil, "you must be a Christian, that is evident. You cannot hold out any longer, for you are too uneasy in your sins. You will have to be a Christian." "But," says he, "stop in the world, and be a Christian. Remain where you are. 'Sacrifice to your God *in the land*'"; by which he sometimes means this: live in sin, and be a believer. Trust yourself with Christ, and then indulge yourself in whatsoever your heart desires. Do you not know that he is a Saviour of sinners? Therefore stop in your sin, and yet trust in him. Oh, I charge you, by the living God, never be duped by such a treacherous lie as this, for it is not possible that you can find any rest or salvation while you live in sin. My dear hearers, Christ came to save us *from* our sins, but not *in* our sins. He has built a hospital of mercy into which he receives the worst possible cases. All are welcome, but he does not receive them that they may continue sick, but that he may heal them, and make sound men of them. When the Lord Jesus Christ takes hold upon a thief, the man is a thief no longer; his inmost heart becomes honest. When the Lord meets with the harlot, he blots out her iniquity, and she is affected with deep repentance for her crimes, and turns unto her Saviour, desiring henceforth to walk in purity all her days. It is impossible that you should serve God and yet continue to indulge in known sin. What a fool that man is who thinks that he may drink and be a Christian, that he may cheat in his business and be a Christian, that he may act like the ungodly world in all respects, and yet be a Christian! It cannot be. Mark Antony yoked two lions together, and drove them through the streets of Rome; but he could never have yoked together the lion of the pit and the lion of the tribe of Judah. There is a deadly hate between these two. The principle of good, if it be yielded to, will destroy the mastery of evil. There cannot be a compromise between them. No man can serve two *masters*. He may serve two, but not two when each determines to be master. Satan will be master if he can, and Christ will be master, and therefore you cannot serve the two. It must be one or the other. If thou art to have thy sin forgiven thee, thou must leave thy sin. Remember that voice which came to Master John Bunyan when he was playing tipcat on Elstow Green on Sunday morning. He thought that he heard a voice say, "Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to heaven, or wilt thou have thy sins and go to hell?" That problem is proposed to you if you are unconverted and undecided. But as to the idea of keeping your sins and going to heaven, shut that out of the question, for it must not, cannot, shall not be: it is a compromise proposed by Satan, but the Lord will not have it.

Yes, but then Satan, retreating a little, says, "Well, now, of course I did not mean that you were not to give up your grosser sins; but I mean to tell you of something better. Love the world, and live with worldlings, and find your company and your joy among them, and yet be a Christian. Surely you are not going to throw up everybody, are you? You know you must not be singular. You must not make

yourself an oddity altogether. You have many merry companions of yours, keep to them. They do not, perhaps, do you much good. Well, you must not be too particular, and precise." So he says, "Continue in the world, and be a Christian." Shall I tell you God's word about that? "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." That is short, though not sweet. A man says, "Well, I shall be a Christian; but I shall find my chief pleasure and my amusement where the world finds it." Will you? "I shall be a Christian; but I shall hold with the hare and run with the hounds. I shall be with the church on Sunday; but nobody shall know that I am not the veriest worldling on the week-day. Can I not put my hymn-book in one pocket and a pack of cards in the other, and so go to heaven and keep friends with the world?" No, it is not possible. "Let my people go, that they may serve me," is God's word. Not, "Let them stop in the land, and still serve you and serve me too." It cannot be. "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?" That text is another sharp, drawn sword cutting to the quick; and there are professors who ought to feel it go to their very hearts, for they are trying all that they possibly can to go as near as ever they can to the border-line, and yet to keep up a hope. What would you think of a man who went as near as he could to burning his house down, just to try how much fire it would stand? Or of one who cut himself with a knife, to see how deep he could go without mortally wounding himself? Or of another, who experimented as to how large a quantity of poison he could take? Why, these are extreme follies; but not so great as that of a man who tries how much sin he may indulge in, and yet be saved. I pray you, do not attempt such perilous experiments. "Come ye out from among them; be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." Shun with horror Satan's old compromise: dream not that you can love the world, and yet have the love of the Father in you.

When the enemy cannot get on with that, he harks back a little, and cries, "That is very proper; you are hearing very faithful teaching this time, but listen to me! You can live for yourself, and be a Christian. Do not go out into worldly company, but enjoy yourself at home. You see you want to have your own soul saved. Well, live for *that*." This is only a subtler and uglier form of selfishness. It is nothing better. "Look," says Satan, "I do not ask you to be profligate with your money, be penurious with it: be very thrifty. Everybody will pat you on the back, and say, 'He is taking care of number one, and he is doing the right thing.' Come, now, and make a good thing of religion. Believe in Jesus Christ, of course, in order that you yourself may be saved, and then live all the rest of your life trying to hear sermons that will feed you, and read books that will comfort you, and become a great man among religious folks." Hateful advice! Do you not know, dear friends, that the very essence of Christianity is for a man to deny himself? Self can never properly be the end-all and be-all of a man's existence. Self is to religion, in fact, nothing but the flesh in a pretendedly spiritual form. If a man lives to himself, he is under the dominion of an evil spirit just as much as if he went out into open sin. So you must come out of that. Selfishness will not do. You must love the Lord with all your heart, and you must love your fellow-men. There

must be an obedience to that command that thou "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself," or else there is no coming out into safety. Thus the first compromise will not hold at all.

Pushed back from the first compromise, Pharaoh proposes a second, and this is found in the twenty-eighth verse of the eighth chapter :—

"*Only ye shall not go very far away.*"

Satan says, "Yes, I see your conscience tells you that you must come out from the world, and come out from sin, but do not go very far away, for you may want to come back again. In the first place, do not make it public. Do not join a church. Be like a rat behind the wainscot; never come out except it be at night to get a mouthful of food. Do not commit yourself by being baptized, and joining the church; do not go so very far as that. Just try, if you can, and save yourself from the wrath to come by secret religion, but do not let any one know it. There really cannot be any need of actually saying, 'I am a Christian.'" My friend, this is the very depth of Satan. When a soldier goes to the barrack-room, if he is a child of God he may say, "I shall not kneel down to pray because they might throw a boot at me, as they generally do in the barrack-room. I can keep my religion to myself." That man will go wrong. But if he boldly says, "I will fly my flag. I am a Christian, and I will never yield that point, come what may"; he will stand. The beginning of yielding is like the letting out of water; no man knows to what a flood it will come. This is what Satan would have with some of you, that you may fall by little and little. Therefore defeat him: come out boldly. Take up your cross, and follow Jesus. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

The tempter also says, "Do not be so very precise and exact. The Puritanic saints—well, people point the finger at them. You need not be quite so particular." By which he means this—that you may sin as much as you like so long as you do not violate propriety; and that, after all, you are not to obey God thoroughly, but only to obey him when it pleases you. This is flat rebellion against God. This will never do.

"Well," he says, "if you are to be so precise, yet do not be so desperately earnest. There are some of those friends down there at the Tabernacle who are always looking after the souls of others, and trying to proclaim Christ to everybody. You know they are a very dogmatic lot, and they are a great deal too pushing and fanatical. Do not go with them." Just so. He means, stand and serve the Lord, because you dare not do any other, but never give him your heart; never throw your soul into his cause. That is what Satan says; and do you think that such traitorous service will save you? If Moses had thought that going a little way into the wilderness would have saved Israel, he would have let them go a little way into the wilderness, and there would have been an end of it. But Moses knew that nothing would do for God's Israel but to go clean away as far as ever they could, and put a deep Red Sea between them and Egypt. He knew that they were never to turn back again, come what might, and so Moses pushed for a going forth to a distance; as I would in God's name push for full committal to Christ with everybody who is tempted to a compromise.

"Oh, but," Satan will say, "be earnest too. Yes, be earnest. Of course that is right enough; and be precise in all your actions; but do not be one of those people who are always praying in secret. You can keep an open religious profession going without much private praying, without heart-searching, without communion with God. These are tough things," says he, "to keep up. You will find it difficult to maintain the inward life, and preserve a clean heart and a right spirit. Let these go by default, and attend to externals, and be busy and active; and that will do." But it will not do, for unless the heart and soul be renewed by the Spirit of God, it little matters what your externals may be. You have failed before God unless your very soul is joined unto him by a perpetual covenant that shall never be forgotten. What a blessing it is when a man can say,—I have done with these compromises; I do not want to serve God and win favour with the world. I do not want to go just a little way from the world. I pray God to divide me from the world by an everlasting divorce, just as it was with Paul when he said, "The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Happy man who has come right out under divine guidance to seek the eternal Canaan! His is the path of safety and acceptance; but they that temporize and parley with sin and Satan will find mischief come out of it.

Pushed back from that, the enemy suggests another compromise in the tenth chapter, at the eighth and eleventh verses:—

"*Go, serve the Lord your God: but who are they that shall go? Go now, ye that are men, and serve the Lord.*"

Yes, that is his next point. "Yes," he says, "we see what it has come to. You are driven at last to this—that you must be an out-and-out Christian; but, now," he says, "do not worry your wife with it; do not take it home." Or he says to the woman, "You are to follow Christ. I see you must. You seem driven to *that;* but never say anything to your husband about it." Was not that a pretty idea of Pharaoh's—that all the men were to go, and were to leave the women and children to be his slaves? And that is just the idea of Satan. "You have plenty to do to look after yourself; but your wife—well, leave her to her own ways. Your husband—leave him to his irreligion." Let us answer him thus,—"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." So said Joshua of old; and so let every man here say. Remember Paul's words to the Philippian gaoler, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, *and thy house.*" Let us pray that we may have the whole house for Christ. Up to your measure of influence over your family, say within yourself, "My Lord, I will never rest until I see all my family brought to thy dear feet. Lord, save my wife: save my husband: save my father: save my brothers and sisters! Bring these out of bondage!" You cannot be a Christian unless that is your heart-felt desire. He that careth not for his own house is worse than a heathen man and a publican.

And then the children. "Oh," Pharaoh says, "leave the children!" Do you not see he knew very well that, if they did that, they would themselves come back again? What man among us would go away

into the wilderness, and leave his wife and children in slavery? Should we not want to come back to them? Should we not think that we heard their cries? Should we not want to look into their dear faces again? Leave them in slavery? Oh, that cannot be! And yet let me sorrowfully say that there are many professing Christians who seem as though they were themselves determined to be the Lord's, but their children should belong to Pharaoh and to the devil. For instance, the boy is getting of a certain age. Let him be sent to a foreign school, and, preferably, a Roman Catholic school. Will that be useful to his religion? Yet if he should turn out a Papist, his foolish father will almost break his heart. It was all his own doing, was it not? Well, the girls, of course, they must go into society: of course, they must "go into society." And so everything is done to put them into places of danger, where they will not be likely to be converted, and where, in all probability, they will become gay, and vain, and light. Then a situation is looked out for the boy. How often there is no question about the master being a Christian! Is it a business that the lad can follow without injury to his morals? "Nay, it is a fine roaring trade, and it is a cutting house, where he will pick it up in a smart way. Let him go there." Ay; and if he goes to perdition? Alas, there are Christian men who do not think of that! The children of some professors are offered up to the Moloch of this world. We think it a horrible thing that the heathens should offer their children in sacrifice to idols, and yet many professors put their children where, according to all likelihood, they will be ruined. Do not let it be so. Do not let the devil entangle one of you in that compromise, but say, "No, no, no; my house, God helping me, shall be so conducted that I will not put temptation in my children's way. I will not lead them into the paths of sin. If they will go wrong, despite their father's exhortations and their mother's tears, why, they must; but, at any rate, I will be clear of their blood, for I will not put them into places where they would be led astray." I am sure there is a great deal of importance in this remark, and if it cuts anybody very closely, and he says, "I think you are very personal," that is exactly what I mean to be—the precise thing I am aiming at. I desire to put this thing before every individual Christian, that all may see the right and the wrong of it, and may resolve, "Our women and our children shall go with us to worship God. They as well as ourselves shall leave this Egypt, as far as God's grace can help us to accomplish it."

Now the devil is getting pushed into a corner. Here is the man's whole house to go right for God, and the man gives himself up to be a Christian out and out. What now? "Well," says the enemy in the twenty-fourth verse of that tenth chapter,

"Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your herds be stayed."

Just so. What does Moses say to that? "Thou must give us also sacrifices and burnt-offerings, that we may sacrifice unto Jehovah our God. Our cattle also shall go with us; *there shall not a hoof be left behind;* for thereof must we take to serve the Lord our God; and we know not with what we must serve the Lord, until we come thither." This was the divine policy of "No surrender," and I plead for it with

you. Satan says, "Do not use your property for God. Do not use your talents and your abilities; especially, do not use your money for the Lord Jesus. Keep that for yourself. You will want it one of these days, perhaps. Keep it for your own enjoyment. Live to God in other things, but, as to that, live to yourself." Now, a genuine Christian says, "When I gave myself to the Lord I gave him everything I had. From the crown of my head to the sole of my foot I am the Lord's. He bids me provide things honest in the sight of all men, and care for my household; and so I shall; but yet I am not my own, for I am bought with a price; and therefore it becomes me to feel that everything I have, or ever shall have, is a dedicated thing, and belongs unto the Lord, that I may use it as his steward, not as if it were mine, but at his discretion, and at his bidding. I cannot leave my substance to be the devil's. That must come with me, and must be all my Lord's; for his it is even as I am." The Christian takes the line which Moses indicated: "I do not know what I may be required to give. I know that I am to sacrifice unto the Lord my God, and I do not know how much. I cannot tell what may be the needs of the poor, the needs of the church, the needs of Christ's church all over the land. I do not know, but this I know, that all that I have stands at the surrender point. If my Redeemer wants it he shall have it. If Satan wants it he shall not have a penny of it. If there be anything that is asked of me that will not conduce to good morals—that will not conduce to the promotion of that which is right in the sight of God—I withhold it. But if there be anything that is for Christ's glory and for the good of men, then, as the Lord shall help me, it shall be given freely, and not be begrudged as if it were a tax. It shall be my joy and my delight to devote all that I am, and all that I have, to him who bought me with his precious blood."

Now, brothers and sisters, you that profess to be Christians, come you, stand right square out, and own yourselves wholly and altogether the Lord's.

"'Tis done! the great transaction's done;
I am my Lord's, and he is mine."

"My house is his, and my all is his. Whether I live or die—whether I work or suffer, all that I am, and all that I have, shall be for ever my Lord's." This is to enter into peace: this indeed is to be clean delivered from the power of Satan; this is to be the Lord's free man; and what remains but with joyful footsteps to go onward toward Canaan, shod with shoes of iron and brass, fed with heavenly bread, guarded by the Lord himself, guided by his fiery-cloudy pillar, enjoying all things in him, and finding him in all things? This is to be a Christian of the true order. The Lord make you so by faith in his dear Son! Amen and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Selections from the eighth and tenth chapters of Exodus.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—645, 656, 658.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

SMOKING FLAX.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

On June 1st, 1884.

"The smoking flax shall he not quench."—Isaiah xlii. 3.

I BELIEVE that the first sense of these words is not the one usually given to them, nor yet the one upon which I intend to preach to-night. We read in the 12th of Matthew that our divine Lord was assailed by the scribes and Pharisees, but he did not enter at that time into controversy with them, neither did he make them the perpetual target of his observations. Considering what hypocrites they were, and what boundless mischief they were doing, he treated them very gently indeed. They were, compared to him, but as bruised reeds, and as the smoking flax, and he could, if he had pleased, have broken them up altogether, or have altogether quenched them; but he did not come to be a mere controversialist. He was, in truth, the greatest of all reformers, but he was not so much a breaker-down as he was a builder-up. He came not so much to drive out error by reason, as to expel it by the natural and efficient process of putting truth into its place. So, to a large extent, he left these scribes and Pharisees, and other opponents, alone, and he went quietly on with his own work of healing the sick, and saving the sinful—a very good lesson to us. We get a little pugnacious sometimes, and seek religious controversy; but our Saviour did not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; a bruised reed he did not break, and a smoking flax he did not quench. The best way to put out the twinkling light of a smoking flax was to let the sun shine. Nobody could see it then. Instead of talking down these bruised reeds, he set up the higher claim of sure and certain truth; for men would not care to trust in bruised reeds when they had once seen something more stable and worthy to be relied upon. You and I will best put down error by preaching truth. If we preach up Christ, the devil goes down. If a crooked stick is before you, you need not explain how crooked it is: lay a straight one down by the side of it, and the work is well done. Preach the truth, and error will stand abashed in its presence.

That is, no doubt, the first meaning of this passage, as you will see by the connection in Matthew. It is said, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." When the Lord sends forth judgment unto victory, then it will be all over with the bruised reed and the smoking flax of the hypocrite, the Pharisee, the formalist, the legalist, and every other opponent.

Usually these words are understood to mean that Jesus Christ will deal very gently with timid believers, and this meaning is not to be rejected; for in the first place, it is true; and, in the second place, it is true out of this text also, for if our Lord Jesus in his lifetime was gentle even to hypocrites, how much more will he be gentle to sincere but timorous spirits; if it be true that he will not quench the smoking flax even of a Pharisee, how much more true must it be that the smoking flax of a penitent shall not be quenched! So that, if the text does not *say* what is generally understood by it, it implies it, and the words so clearly run into the meaning that is commonly given to them.

I take it that there is a kind of instinct in the church, so that even when judged according to criticism she may seem to misapply a passage of Scripture, she generally does not misapply it, but only brings out a second light which was always behind the first, and which shines none the less brightly, but all the more so, because the first was there. I shall therefore take the text to mean something other than I have stated. "The smoking flax shall he not quench," is a text for you timorous, desponding, feeble-minded, and yet true-hearted believers, and you may appropriate it to yourselves. May the Holy Spirit help you so to do!

I. In talking of it, at this time, I shall first enquire, WHAT STATE THIS METAPHOR REPRESENTS.

A smoking flax represents *a state in which there is a little good.* The margin is "dimly burning flax." It is burning; but it is burning very dimly. There is a spark of good within the heart. You, my dear friend, have a little faith; it is not much bigger than a grain of mustard-seed, but faith of that size has great power in it. I wish that your faith would grow to a tree, but I am very glad that you have any, even though it be minute as the mustard-seed. You have a desire, too, after better things: you are always wanting to be more holy. You love to be among God's people, and though sometimes you are afraid that you are not one of them, you would give all that you have to be sure that you were, for you love their conversation. Having those desires, you do pray. "O sir," say you, "it is not worth calling prayer!" Well, we will not call it prayer, then, but it is prayer; for sometimes, when not even a word is spoken, the desire of the heart is a most acceptable pleading with God. "O sir," you say, "but I do not always desire alike!" I am very sorry that it is so. I wish you always had a strong desire after Christ. Still, you do desire. There is a longing, a desiring, a panting, a hungering, a thirsting; therefore there is some little good in you. "Do not praise me," you say. Oh, no, dear friend, I will not praise you! I know that you would not like it; for you have a modest estimate of yourself, and like the publican you cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." That tune suits you, does it not? I can see somewhat of good in you since you do not think well of yourself. If you did,

we might think ill of you; but inasmuch as you even repent over your repentance, and feel as if your tears want weeping over, I am glad of it. Lowliness of heart is a grace very much despised in these days, but very much valued by the King of heaven. "To this man," says he, "will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." There is some little good in you *put there by the Spirit of God.* "Ah," say you, "I like that word, sir; I am sure there was no good in me by nature." Friend, I am sure of it too, if you are at all like me. The grace of God has put in us our first desire, our first loathing of sin, our first wish to be forgiven, our first desire to return to our Father from whom we have wandered. The Spirit put it there, and you are like the smoking flax, because there is a little living fire in you.

You are like smoking flax, again, because *your good is too little to be of much use to anybody.* What could we do with a smoking flax if we had it here to-night, and the gas was all out? You would, perhaps, see a glimmer, but you would say, "It is not light, but darkness visible." I like a soul in darkness to find that darkness visible. There is a good point about that. Alas, you are such a poor timid creature, you could not comfort a child of God; you cannot even comfort yourself! You could not strengthen the weak, for you want all the strengthening for your own self. You are not much of a soldier; you could not march in rank: we have to carry you about in the ambulance. Well, we are not tired of carrying you, nor is God either. You are still a soldier, for you would fight if you could. Though you are invalided, yet whenever the trumpet sounds you wish to be in the thick of the fight. Poor thing that you are, you would soon be trampled down; but you have spirit enough for it, for which I thank God. Though your courage is of no great use to anybody, yet it is of use to you, for it proves you to be a soldier of the cross, a follower of the Lamb. I would to God that you had more light, that you might light your brother on his dreary way. I wish you had more faith, more joy, more hope, more rest, for you might then be of service to the Lord's household, and the King might find in you a willing helper. But as you cannot do that, you are like the smoking flax: there is a little good, but that good is not great enough to make you very useful. Yet I will tell you one thing you can do. When you meet with another poor soul that is like you, you can sympathize, can you not? You see, when bright and shining lights come near those who are dim, they are apt rather to shame them than to comfort them; but you will not do that. So far you may even help the despondent; at least, you will do so one of these days.

Smoking flax, then, has a little fire, but it is so little that it is of small service, and, what is worse, *it is so little that it is rather unpleasant.* No one delights in the smell of a candle that is dying out. Smoking flax does not yield a sweet savour; neither does a Christian when he is in a mournful condition. There is a little good in him, but there is a great deal of wrong about him, and that wrong has an ill savour. Sometimes these smoking-flax people believe a great many errors. They do not hold the true and solid doctrine of God's everlasting love: they favour notions that are not scriptural; and error is never sweet to Christ, nor to any of his own people. Besides, they have a great smoke

of doubts. They doubt this, and they question that, and they suspect the other thing. There is nothing more obnoxious to our divine Lord than distrust of him. It is a gracious act on his part that he puts up with it. One said to Christ, "If thou canst"; and that was a shocking thing to say to an almighty Lord: another said to him, "If thou wilt"; and that was a shameful thing to say to one so kind; and yet he bore with them both. Doubting hearts will cry, "If thou wilt, and if thou canst," and do anything sooner than believe. This is to make an ill savour in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ; for, though *we* may reckon our doubts to be trifling, they are no trifle to him, but exceedingly grievous and provoking to his heart. A dear sister came in after service this morning, and told me that she was fifty years old on the same day as myself, so she came to shake hands with me; and she added, "I am like you in that; but I am the very reverse of you in other things." I replied, "Then you must be a good woman." "No," she said, "that is not what I mean." "But are you not a believer?" "Well," she said, "I—I will try to be." I got hold of her hand, and I said, "You are not going to tell me that you will try and believe my Lord Jesus Christ, for that means unbelief of him who must be true;" and I held her fast while I added, "When your mother was about, did you say to her, 'Mother, I will try and believe you'? No, you would believe her because she was true; and I must have you believe Jesus Christ." She said, "Sir, do pray for me." "No," I said, "I am not inclined to do that. What should I pray for you about? If you will not believe my Lord, what blessing can he give you? What has he ever done that you should say, 'I cannot believe him'?" She again answered, "I will try." I was not content till I had reminded her of the word, "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life," and I pressed her to a full faith in the risen Lord. The Holy Spirit enabled her to trust, and then she cried, "I have been looking to my feelings, sir, and this has been my mistake." I have no doubt that she had done so; and a great many others are doing the same; and their doubts are just that horrible smoke which comes from smoking flax. O, ye poor doubters, believe the Lord Jesus Christ! To say, "I cannot believe him," is to say in other words that he is a liar, and we cannot allow you to say *that.*

Dear friend, if you are like the smoking flax, there is something good in you; but that is so sadly little that there is a great deal that is trying about you; yet the Lord will not quench you. You are full of all sorts of fears; you are afraid of a shadow; you are trembling at nothing at all. Why is this? You are troubled when you ought to be glad, and you make your whole family sad when there is no earthly reason for it. May the Lord deliver you! Those that are highest in faith have tried to comfort you, and you have pulled them down, instead of their being able to draw you up. Come, friend, I would be as gentle as ever I can: my text bids me be so. I have no extinguisher for your smoking flax, for my Lord has said, "The smoking flax shall he not quench."

I must add one more thing about this state, and it is this, though the good of it is so little that it is of very little use to other people, and sometimes is very obnoxious, yet there is *enough good in you to be dangerous in Satan's esteem.* He does not like to observe that there is yet a little fire in you, for he fears that it may become a flame. If any

of you were to see a man standing at the back of one of our public buildings lighting his pipe, I will be bound to say that you would be half afraid of an explosion, for he might be applying dynamite. There are times when the smallest smoke would fill the bravest men with fear. Even so

> "Satan trembles when he sees
> The weakest saint upon his knees."

If he hears you groaning about your sin, he is frightened at it. "Oh," says he, "they have begun to feel: they have begun to mourn: they have begun to desire: they have begun to pray: and soon they will leave me." Let a farmer perceive a little smoke coming out of one of his ricks, and I am sure that he will not say that there is nothing at all in a smoking flax, but he will hasten to prevent a conflagration. So the little grace that is in you, dear friend, Christ sees, and he approves of it, for he knows the possibilities of it—how little faith can grow into strong faith—how the grain of mustard-seed can become a tree, and the birds of the air may yet lodge in the branches thereof; and Satan, also, knows what may come of it, and he is moved to quench it if he can. We, therefore, would encourage you, and fan your spark to a flame.

There is the first question answered. What state does this represent?

II. Secondly, WHEN ARE SOULS IN THAT STATE?

Some are in that state when they are newly saved—*when the flax has just been lighted.* Those that are to be received into the church to-night I welcome very heartily, but they are very newly lit, and some perhaps would have said, "Let them wait a bit." Ay, but then our Lord does not quench the smoking flax because it is newly lighted, nor will I. No place in the world is so good for the lambs as the fold. No place is so good for babes as their own home. No place is so good for young Christians as the church of God. So let them come.

Being newly converted, they are strange to many things. You have made a host of discoveries. You find more depravity in your heart than you thought was there; you find enemies where you expected to meet with friends. All this is apt to damp your courage; but do not be cast down; for though it be but a little that you are lighted, yet the loving Jesus will not quench the smoking flax.

Sometimes a candle smokes, not because it is newly lit, but because it is *almost extinguished.* I know that I speak to some Christians who have been alight with the fire of grace for many years, and yet they feel as if they were near the dark hour of extinction. But you shall not go out. The Lord will not quench you himself, nor will he permit the devil to quench you. He will keep you alight with grace. "Oh," but you say, "I am so depressed in spirit!" Yes, some of God's best servants have been of a sorrowful spirit. Remember Hannah, whom Eli cruelly rebuked, but who, nevertheless, got a blessing. David had to say, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?" and yet he was a man after God's own heart. Perhaps you are not well, or you have had an illness that has told much upon your nervous system, and you are depressed; and therefore it is that you think that grace is leaving you, but it will not. Your spiritual life does not depend upon nature, else it might expire: it depends upon grace, and grace will never cease to shine till it lights you into glory. There-

fore be not cast down. You may think that your light will go out in eternal darkness, but it never shall, for the Lord Jesus Christ will preserve the flame.

Sometimes the wick smokes when *worldliness has damped it.* If some of you never have any holy joy, I am not surprised, for you are so taken up with the world, and so fond of it. The life of God is in you, but it is smothered. You are like an autumn fire out in the garden when they are burning the weeds: there *is* a fire, but all you can see is smoke. Yes, you smother up your piety with the things of this world, and no wonder that it smokes; but what a mercy it is that the Lord does not allow even you to perish! He keeps the dying flame alive though hidden away.

At times a wick burns low because *a very strong wind has blown upon it.* Many men and women are the subjects of very fierce temptations. The place in which they live is a trial to them, and their natural constitution furnishes them with a host of temptations; and so the flax scarcely burns, but smokes and smoulders. We do not wonder that it should be so.

There are many other reasons why we grow dim at times—reasons, but none of them sufficient to be an excuse. If we were what we ought to be, we should be burning and shining lights always, and there would be no times in which we should be like the smoking flax; but then we are not what we ought to be, we fall short of the true standard, and we become feeble believers.

III. I desire to finish with a word of promise. WHAT DOES JESUS DO WITH THOSE WHO ARE IN THIS STATE? He says that he will not quench the smoking flax. What a world of mercy lies in that word! Everybody else would quench us but Christ. I am sure that some Christians get into such a state that the most loving Christian friends find it hard to bear with them; and fear that such a state of mind cannot be consistent with grace at all. Thus your friend would give you over as lost. But Jesus Christ says that he will not do so.

He will not quench you, first, *by pronouncing legal judgment upon you.* He will not say, "You have broken my laws, and I have done with you." If he did, our only answer could be, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." If the Lord were once to come to that, he would quench us all. Not only some few of the tremblers, but the strongest among us must go to the wall. The Lord Jesus Christ has not come to condemn, but to save.

He will not quench you, dear friend, *by setting up a high experimental standard.* Certain deep divines will say, "You must have felt so much of this, and so much of the other, or else you cannot be a child of God." Who told the good man so? Who made him to be a judge? The Lord Jesus Christ does not quench even the feeble, faint desire, or the trembling faith of his servants, though they do fall far short of that experience which ought to belong to a child of God.

He will not judge you, dear friend, *by a lofty standard of knowledge.* I have known persons who have thought, "If that convert is not better instructed in the doctrines, he is no child of God." The Lord has some of his children whose heads are in a very queer state; and if he first puts their hearts right he afterwards puts their heads right. But for you

and for me to say that a man is not a child of God, because he does not know all that the advanced saints know, is a very wicked thing. I am sure that your little child, who cannot read or write, is pressed to your bosom, dear mother, with just as much affection as that brave son of yours who has just been winning the first prize at school. You do not say, "I will not love the little one because he is not a man;" or, "I will not love my little daughter because she is not grown up to womanhood." Oh, no! The Lord loves the little ones. If you can say, "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see," you are taught of God. If you know these two things—yourself a sinner, and Christ a Saviour—you are scholar enough to go to heaven.

And the Lord Jesus Christ will not quench you *by setting up a standard by which to measure your graces.* It is not, "So much faith, and you are saved. So little faith, and you are lost." Oh, no; if thou hast faith as a grain of mustard-seed it will save thee. If thou dost believe in Christ, thou art saved. That woman who touched the hem of Christ's garment with her finger, and then tremblingly slunk back, was truly healed, slight as her touch was. Even Simeon, who took the Saviour up into his arms, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace," cannot more surely be said to have had a saving faith than that poor woman who came behind, and touched the hem of the Master's garment.

Come along, you little ones,—you trembling ones! Be not afraid! Jesus will not quench you by any of these means. I will tell you what he will do with you; and that is, instead of quenching you, *he will protect you.* He will blow upon you with the soft breath of his love till the little spark will rise into a flame. You young folks do not know what trouble some of us used to have, forty-five years ago, when we got up of a morning and had to strike a light in the old-fashioned way. There we were with a flint and a steel, striking away in a tiresome manner till we spied a little spark down in the tinder—oh, such a little one, and then we gently tried to blow it into a flame! How we used to prize a spark on a cold, frosty morning, when our fingers were pretty well frozen! We never put out the sparks by shutting the lid on the top of the tinder, but we tried if we could to light our match.

Now, the Lord Jesus Christ will blow softly upon you with his gentle Spirit. He will bring to your mind exceeding great and precious promises. He will bring to you kind friends, who shall tell you their experience, and try to comfort you. I should not wonder, my dear brother, that one of these days I shall hear you pray a strong, brave prayer; I should not wonder if you before long come forward, and made an open profession; and if you have done so already, I feel pretty sure that you will honour it, and grow stronger, till one day we shall say, "Who is that bold witness for Christ? Who is that burning and shining light?" He is the man who was once likened to the smoking flax. I have had the portraits of my two boys taken on their birthdays, from the first birthday till they were twenty-one. The first year the little fellows are sitting, two of them in one perambulator. At twenty-one they are doing nothing of the sort: they are men full-grown. Yet I can trace them all along, from the time when they were babes, till they became little boys, and then youths, and then young men. I

should not have been pleased to have seen them wheeled about in the perambulator for twenty-one years. In that case, I should have thought myself a most unfortunate father. And so I do not want to have any of you remaining in spiritual infancy: we long to see you come to the fulness of the stature of perfect men in Christ Jesus. Life is precious, but we look for growth: a spark is fire, but we expect flame: grace is priceless, but we long to see it daily increased by going on unto perfection. Despise not the day of small things, but yet advance to greater things than these. Be comforted, but not self-satisfied; rest, but do not loiter.

The table of the Lord is spread, and it is a feast not for men alone, but for babes in grace. Come hither you that love the Lord, and you that trust him, however feeble your trust. However faint your courage, come and welcome! My Lord's table is not for giants only, but for infants also. The viands are not strong meat, but bread and wine, fit food for the faint and feeble. Examine yourselves, ye sincere tremblers; but do not let the examination end in your staying away; but rather mark how the text says, "let a man examine himself, and *so let him eat*": not so let him refrain from eating. Ho, you that hope in his mercy, your Lord invites you to his own feast of love! You may come and welcome. If you have come to Christ himself by faith, come to his table, and remember him to-night.

The Lord bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.—Isaiah li.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—734, 682.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ELIJAH'S PLEA.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On November 9th, 1884.

"Let it be known that I have done all these things at thy word."—1 Kings xviii. 36.

The acts of Elijah were very singular. It had not been known from the foundations of the earth that a man should shut up the doors of the rain for the space of three years. Yet Elijah suddenly leaped upon the scene, announced the judgment of the Lord, and then disappeared for a time. When he reappears, at the bidding of God, he orders Ahab to gather the priests of Baal; and to put to the test the question as to whether Baal or Jehovah was indeed God. Bullocks shall be slain and laid upon the wood without fire; and the God who shall answer by fire shall be determined to be the one living and true God, the God of Israel. We might question within ourselves what right the prophet had to restrain the clouds, or to put God's honour under test. Suppose the Lord had not willed to answer him by fire; had he any right to make the glory of God hang upon such terms as he proposed? The answer is that *he had done all these things according to God's word.* It was no whim of his to chastise the nation with a drought. It was no scheme of his, concocted in his own brain, that he should put the Godhead of Jehovah or of Baal to the test by a sacrifice to be consumed by miraculous fire. Oh, no! If you read the life of Elijah through, you will see that whenever he takes a step it is preceded by, "the word of the Lord came unto Elijah the Tishbite." He never acts of himself; God is at his back. He moves according to the divine will, and he speaks according to the divine teaching; and he pleads this with the Most High,—"I have done all these things at thy word; now let it be known that it is so." It makes the character of Elijah stand out, not as an example of reckless daring, but as the example of a man of sound mind. Faith in God is true wisdom: childlike confidence in the word of God is the highest form of common-sense. To believe him that cannot lie, and trust in him that cannot fail, is a kind of wisdom that none but fools will laugh at. The wisest of men must concur in the opinion that it is always best to place your reliance where it will certainly be justified, and always best to believe that which cannot possibly be false.

Elijah had so believed, and acted on his belief, and now he naturally expects to be justified in what he has done. An ambassador never dreams that his authorized acts will be repudiated by his king. If a man acts as your agent and does your bidding, the responsibility of his acts lies with you, and you must back him up. It were, indeed, an atrocious thing to send a servant on an errand, and, when he faithfully performed it to the letter, to repudiate your sending him. It is not so with God. If we will only so trust him as to do as he bids us, he will never fail us; but he will see us through, though earth and hell should stand in the way. It may not be to-day, nor to-morrow, but as surely as the Lord liveth, the time shall come when he that trusted him shall have joy of his confidence.

It seems to me that Elijah's plea is to obedient saints *a firm ground for prayer*, and to those who cannot say that they have acted according to God's word, it is *a solemn matter for question.*

I. To begin with, this is A FIRM GROUND FOR PRAYER. You are *a minister of God, or a worker in the cause of Christ*, and you go forth and preach the gospel with many tears and prayers, and you continue to use all means, such as Christ has ordained: do you say to yourself, "May I expect to have fruit of all this?" Of course you may. You are not sent on a frivolous errand: you are not bidden to sow dead seed that will never spring up. But when that anxiety weighs heavily upon your heart, go you to the mercy-seat with this as one of your arguments, "Lord, I have done according to thy word. Now let it be seen that it is even so. I have preached thy word, and thou hast said, 'It shall not return unto me void.' I have prayed for these people, and thou hast said, 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'; let it be seen that this is according to thy word." Or, if you are a teacher, you can say, "I brought my children in supplication before thee, and I have gone forth, after studying thy Word, to teach them, to the best of my ability, the way of salvation. Now, Lord, I claim it of thy truth that thou shouldest justify my teaching, and my expectation, by giving me to see the souls of my children saved by thee, through Jesus Christ, thy Son." Do you not see that you have a good argument, if the Lord has set you to do this work? He has, as it were, bound himself by that very fact to support you in the doing of it; and if you, with holy diligence and carefulness, do all these things according to his word, then you may come with certainty to the throne of grace, and say unto him, "Do as thou hast said. Hast thou not said, 'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him'? Lord I have done that. Give me my sheaves. Thou has said, 'Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days.' Lord, I have done that; and therefore I entreat thee fulfil thy promise to me." You may plead in this fashion with the same boldness which made Elias say in the presence of all the people, "Let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I have done all these things at thy word."

Next, I would apply this teaching *to a whole church.* I am afraid many churches of Christ are not prospering. The congregations are thin, the church is diminishing, the prayer-meeting scantily attended, spiritual life low. If I can conceive of a church in such

a condition which, nevertheless, can say to God, "We have done all these things at thy word," I should expect to see that church soon revived in answer to prayer. The reason why some churches do not prosper is, because they have *not* done according to God's word. They have not even cared to know what God's Word says. Another book is their standard. A man is their leader and legislator, instead of the inspired Word of God. Some churches are doing little or nothing for the conversion of sinners. But any man, in any church, who can go before God, and say, "Lord, we have had among us the preaching of the gospel; and we have earnestly prayed for the blessing; we have gathered about thy minister, and we have held him up in the arms of prayer and faith; we have, as individual Christians, sought out each one his particular service, we have gone forth each one to bring in souls to thee, and we have lived in godliness of life by the help of thy grace, now, therefore prosper thy cause," shall find it a good plea. Real prosperity must come to any church that walks according to Christ's rules, obeys Christ's teaching, and is filled with Christ's Spirit. I would exhort all members of churches that are in a poor way just now, to see to it that all things are done at God's word, and then hopefully wait in holy confidence. The fire from heaven must come: the blessing cannot be withheld.

The same principle may be applied also *to any individual believers* who are in trouble through having done right. It happens often that a man feels, "I could make money, but I must not; for the course proposed would be wrong. Such a situation is open, but it involves what my conscience does not approve. I will rather suffer than I will make gain by doing anything that is questionable." It may be that you are in great trouble distinctly through obedience to God. Then, you are the man above all others who may lay this case before the Most High: "Lord, I have done all these things at thy word, and thou hast said, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.' I beseech thee interpose for me." Somehow or other God will provide for you. If he means you to be further tried, he will give you strength to bear it; but the probabilities are that now he has tested you, he will bring you forth from the fire as gold.

"Do good and know no fear,
For so thou in the land shalt dwell,
And God thy food prepare."

Once again. I would like to apply this principle *to the seeking sinner.* You are anxious to be saved. You are attentive to the word, and your heart says, "Let me know what this salvation is, and how to come at it, for I will have it whatever stands in the way." You have heard Jesus say, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate." You have heard his bidding, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to life eternal." You long to enter the strait gate, and eat of the meat which endureth; you would give worlds for such a boon. Thou hast well spoken, my friend. Now, listen:—thou canst not have heaven through thy doings, as a matter of merit. There is no merit possible to thee, for thou hast sinned, and art already condemned. But God has laid down certain lines upon which he has promised to meet thee, and to bless thee. Hast thou followed those lines? For if thou hast, he

will not be false to thee. It is written,—"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"—can you come before God, and say, "I have believed and have been baptized"? then you are on firm pleading ground. It is written again,—"Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall have mercy." When you have confessed them, and forsaken them, you have a just claim upon the promise of God, and you can say to him, "Lord, fulfil this word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. There is no merit in my faith, or my baptism, or my repentance, or my forsaking of sin; yet as thou hast put thy promise side by side with these things, and I have been obedient to thee therein, I now come to thee, and say, 'Prove thine own truth, for I have done all these things at thy word.'" No sinner will come before God at last, and say, "I trusted as thou didst bid me trust; and yet I am lost." It is impossible. Thy blood, if thou art lost, will be on thine own head; but thou shalt never be able to lay thy soul's damnation at the door of God. *He* is not false: it is *thou* that art false.

You see, then, how the principle can be applied in prayer: "I have done these things at thy word; therefore, O Lord, do as thou hast said."

II. We shall go a little over the same ground while I ask you to put yourselves through your paces by way of SELF-EXAMINATION as to whether or not you have done all these things at God's word.

First, let every *worker* here who has not been successful answer this question—Have you done all these things at God's word? Come. *Have you preached the gospel?* Was it the gospel? Was it Christ you preached, or merely something about Christ? Come. Did you give the people bread, or did you give them plates to put the bread on, and knives to cut the bread with? Did you give them drink, or did you give them the cup that had been near the water? Some preaching is not gospel; it is a knife that smells of the cheese, but it is not cheese. See to that matter.

If you preached the gospel, *did you preach it rightly?* That is to say, did you state it affectionately, earnestly, clearly, plainly? If you preach the gospel in Latinized language, the common people will not know what it means; and if you use great big academy words and dictionary words, the market people will be lost while they are trying to find out what you are at. You cannot expect God to bless you unless the gospel is preached in a very simple way. Have you preached the truth lovingly, with all your heart, throwing your very self into it, as if beyond everything you desired the conversion of those you taught? Has prayer been mixed with it? Have you gone into the pulpit without prayer? Have you come out of it without prayer? Have you been to the Sabbath-school without prayer? Have you come away from it without prayer? If so, since you failed to ask for the blessing, you must not wonder if you do not get it.

And another question—*Has there been an example to back your teaching?* Brethren, have we lived as we have preached? Sisters, have you lived as you have taught in your classes? These are questions we ought to answer, because perhaps God can reply to us, "No, you have not done according to my word. It was not my gospel you preached: you were a thinker, and you thought out your own thoughts, and I never promised to bless your thoughts, but only my revealed truth. You

spoke without affection; you tried to glorify yourself by your oratory; you did not care whether souls were saved or not." Or suppose that God can point to you, and say, "Your example was contrary to your teaching. You looked one way, but you pulled another way." Then there is no plea in prayer: is there? Come, let us alter. Let us try to rise to the highest pitch of obedience by the help of God's Spirit: not that we can merit success, but that we can command it if we do but act according to God's bidding. Paul planteth, and Apollos watereth, and God giveth the increase.

And now let me turn to *a church,* and put questions to that church. A certain church does not prosper. I wish that every church would let this question go through all its membership: do we as a church acknowledge the headship of Christ? Do we acknowledge the Statute-Book of Christ—the one Book which alone and by itself is the religion of a Christian man? Do we as a church seek the glory of God? Is that our main and only object? Are we travailing in birth for the souls of the people that live near us? Are we using every scriptural means to enlighten them with the gospel? Are we a holy people? Is our example such as our neighbours may follow? Do we endeavour, even in meat and drink, to do all to the glory of God? Are we prayerful? Oh, the many churches that give up their prayer-meetings, because prayer is not in them! How can they expect a blessing? Are we united? Oh, brothers, it is a horrible thing when church members talk against one another, and even slander one another, as though they were enemies rather than friends. Can God bless such a church as that? Let us search through and through the camp, lest there be an Achan, whose stolen wedge and Babylonian garment, hidden in his tent, shall bind the hands of the Almighty so that he cannot fight for his people. Let every church see to itself in this.

Next I speak to *Christian people* who have fallen into trouble through serving God. I put it to them, but I want to ask them a few questions. Are you quite sure that you did serve God in it? You know there are men who indulge crotchets, and whims, and fancies. God has not promised to support you in your whims. Certain people are obstinate, and will not submit to what everybody must bear who has to earn his bread in a world like this. If you are a mere mule, and get the stick, I must leave you to your reward; but I speak to men of understanding. Be as stern as a Puritan against everything that is wrong, but be supple and yieldable to everything that involves self-denial on your part. God will bear us through if the quarrel be his quarrel; but if it is our own quarrel, why then we may help ourselves. There is a deal of difference between being pig-headed and being steadfast. To be steadfast, as a matter of principle in truth which is taught by God's Word, is one thing; but to get a queer idea into your heads is quite another.

Besides, some men are conscientious about certain things, but they have not an all-round conscience. Some are conscientious about not taking less, but they are not conscientious about giving less. Certain folks are conscientious about resting on the Sabbath; but the other half of the command is, "Six days shalt thou labour," and they do not remember that portion of the law. I like a conscience which works fairly and impartially: but if your conscience gives way for the sake of

your own gain or pleasure, the world will think that it is a sham, and they will not be far from the mark. But if, through conscientiousness, you should be a sufferer, God will bear you through. Only examine and see that your conscience is enlightened by the Spirit of God.

And now to conclude. I want to address *the seeking sinner.* Some are longing to find peace, but they cannot reach it; and I want them to see whether they have not been negligent in some points so that they would not be able to say with Elijah, "I have done all these things at thy word."

Do I need to say that you cannot be saved by your works? Do I need to repeat it over and over again that nothing you do can deserve mercy? Salvation must be the free gift of God. But this is the point. God will give pardon to a sinner, and peace to a troubled heart, on certain lines. Are you on those lines wholly? If so, you will have peace; and if you have not that peace, something or other has been omitted. To begin with, the first thing is *faith.* Dost thou believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Dost thou believe that he has risen from the dead? Dost thou trust thyself wholly, simply, heartily, once for all, with him? Then it is written,—"He that believeth in him hath everlasting life." Go and plead that. "I have no peace," says one. Hast thou unfeignedly *repented* of sin? Is thy mind totally changed about sin, so that what thou didst once love thou dost now hate, and that which thou didst once hate thou dost now love? Is there a hearty loathing, and giving up, and forsaking of sin? Do not deceive yourself. You cannot be saved *in* your sins; you are to be saved *from* your sins. You and your sins must part, or else Christ and you will never be joined. See to this. Labour to give up every sin, and turn from every false way, else your faith is but a dead faith, and will never save you. It may be that you have wronged a person, and have never made *restitution.* Mr. Moody did great good when he preached restitution. If we have wronged another we ought to make it up to him. We ought to return what we have stolen, if that be our sin. A man cannot expect peace of conscience till, as far as in him lies, he has made amends for any wrong he has done to his fellow-men. See to that, or else perhaps this stone may lie at your door, and because it is not rolled away you may never enter into peace.

It may be, my friend, that you have neglected *prayer.* Now, prayer is one of those things without which no man can find the Lord. This is how we seek him, and if we do not seek him how shall we find him? If you have been neglectful in this matter of prayer, you cannot say, "I have done all these things at thy word." May the Lord stir you up to pray mightily, and not to let him go except he bless you! In waiting upon the Lord he will cause you to find rest to your soul.

Possibly, however, you may be a believer in Christ, and you may have no peace because you are associated with ungodly people, and go with them to their follies, and mix with them in their amusements. You see you cannot serve God and Mammon. Thus saith the Lord, "Come out from among them: *be ye separate:* touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." I know a man who sits in this place: he is probably here to-night: and concerning him I am

persuaded that the only thing that keeps him from Christ is the company with which he mingles. I will not say that his company is bad in itself, but it is bad to him; and if there be anything that is right in itself, yet if to me it becomes ruinous, I must give it up. We are not commanded to cut off warts and excrescences, but Jesus bids us cut off right arms, and pluck out right eyes—good things in themselves,—if they are stumbling-blocks in our way so that we cannot get at Christ. What is there in the world that is worth the keeping if it involves me in the loss of my soul? Away with it. Hence many things which are lawful to another man, perhaps, to you may not be expedient because they are injurious. Many things cause no harm to the bulk of men, and yet to some one man they would be the most perilous things, and therefore he should avoid them. Be a law to yourselves, and keep clear of everything that keeps you away from the Saviour.

Perhaps, however, you say, "Well, as far as I know, I do keep out of all ill associations, and I am trying to follow the Lord." Let me press you with a home-question,—*will you be obedient to Jesus in everything?*

"For know—nor of the terms complain—
Where Jesus comes he comes to reign."

If you would have Christ for a Saviour, you must also take him for a King. Therefore it is that he puts it to you "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Will the baptism save me? Assuredly not, for you have no right to be baptized until you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ; but remember, if Christ gives you the command—if you accept him as a King—you are bound to obey him. If instead of saying "Be baptized" he had simply said, "Put a feather in your cap," you might have asked, "Will putting a feather in my cap save me?" No, but you are bound to do it because he bids you. If he had said, "Put a stone in your pocket, and carry it with you"; if that were Christ's command, it would be needful that you take the stone, and carry it with you. The less there seems to be of importance about a command, often the more hinges upon it. I have seen a rebellious boy, to whom his father has said, "Sir, pick up that stick. Pick up that stick." There is no very great importance about the command, and so the youth sullenly refuses to obey. "Do you hear, sir? Pick up that stick." No: he will not. Now, if it had been a great thing that he had been bidden to do, which was somewhat beyond his power, it would not have been so clear an evidence of his rebellion when he refused to do it, as it is when it is but a little and trifling thing, and yet he refuses to obey. Therefore, I lay great stress upon this—that you who do believe in Jesus Christ should do according to his word. Say, "Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do? Be it what it may, I will do it, for I am thy servant." I want you, if you would be Christ's, to be just like the brave men that rode at Balaclava.

"Yours not to reason why;
Yours but to do and die"—

if it need be, if Jesus calls you thereto. Be this your song—

"Through floods and flames if Jesus lead,
I'll follow where he goes."

That kind of faith which at the very outset cries, "I shall not do that, it is not essential"; and then goes on to say, "I do not agree with that, and I do not agree with the other"; is no faith at all. In that case it is you that is master, and not Christ. In his own house you are beginning to alter his commands. "Oh," says one, "but as to baptism: I was baptized, you know, a great many years ago, when I was an infant." Say you so? You have heard of Mary when her mistress said, "Mary, go into the drawing-room, and sweep it and dust it." Her mistress went into the drawing-room, and found it dusty. She said, "Mary, did you not sweep the room, and dust it?" "Well, ma'am, yes I did: only I dusted it first, and then I swept it." That was the wrong order, and spoiled the whole; and it will never do to put Christ's commands the other way upwards, because then they mean just nothing. We ought to do what he bids us, as he bids us, when he bids us, in the order in which he bids us. It is ours simply to be obedient, and when we are so, we may remember that to believe Christ and to obey Christ is the same thing, and often in Scripture the same word that might be read "believe," might be read "obey." He is the Author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him, and that is to all them that believe on him. Trust him then right heartily, and obey him right gladly. You can then go to him in the dying hour, and say, "Lord, I have done all these things at thy word. I claim no merit, but I do claim that thou keep thy gracious promise to me, for thou canst not run back from one word which thou hast spoken."

God bless you, beloved, for Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 Kings xviii. 17—40.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—417, 515, 514.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—As I must send home a weekly bulletin, for so my publishers request, I will simply say that I hope I am mending my nets by the sea-shore; but so many meshes were broken, and are broken still, that I must get to fishing again before I shall know the limit of the damage. One cannot judge while resting how one may be when working. But all looks well for the present, and hopeful for the future.

I avail myself of these few lines to beg an interest in the prayers of my readers. How much I need those prayers, and how greatly they may bless me, I will not attempt to tell. He is happy who has an inheritance in the supplications of the faithful. The prayers of saints are more enriching than the patronage of princes. If any man needs the intercession of many on his behalf, it is he whose daily task it is to feed the multitude with spiritual bread. Loving hearts all over the world will respond to my entreaty that just now I may have special mention in their petitions.

My heart is on fire to begin a new campaign with the utmost vigour. Returning to my place in the battle, I would lift the banner of the Old, Old Gospel on high, and bear it to the front; and for this, renewed power must come from God.

Faith anticipates victory. "The Lord of hosts is with us." Truth, despised for a while, shall yet be had in honour. Our cause is the cause of God and truth. Let us believe and pray.

Yours heartily,

C. H. SPURGEON.

Mentone, March 21st, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A PROCLAMATION FROM THE KING OF KINGS.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 5TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON OCTOBER 16TH, 1884.

"Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord."—Jeremiah iii. 12, 13.

BACKSLIDERS are very many. Departing from the living God is no strange thing. Every church has to lament many that turn aside. In fact, it has become so common in many churches that they have not faith enough to hold to the scriptural doctrine of the perseverance of the saints; as if the want of perseverance in mere professors could alter the truth that where the life and power of God are really in the soul there it will abide and remain. Bitter are the disappointments which result from the apostacy of avowed disciples, and the declension of true followers of the Lamb. We sow, but when we expect to reap we fill not our bosoms with sheaves, for many of those who sprung up hastily from the stony ground are withered as soon as the sun has risen. The morning cloud charms us with the hope of rain, but it soon vanishes: the early dew gives us promise of moisture, but it is exhaled, and the earth is hot beneath our feet. Our hearts ache because of blighted hopes where we looked for blessed results. And not only is it a common thing for men who profess godliness, and for a while run well, suddenly to turn aside; but even God's own people do not keep up the pace as they should. Many Christians are one while hot, and another lukewarm, and even cold. They are diligent and fervent to-day, but idle and indifferent to-morrow. There are Galatians among us still, who seem one way and another to be bewitched with error. Even the best of believers are not always at their best. Who among us has not had cause to make confession that he has not kept up to his first love at all times; neither has his lamp been always clearly burning, nor has he himself been all through the night equally wakeful and watchful for the coming of

the Lord? The wise virgins sleep as well as the foolish ones. Alas, that it should be so! Had it not been for the interposition of God's grace, in many an instance, backslidings that have been healed might have been backslidings unhealed, and the gaping wound might have bled to the dreadful weakness of those who suffered from it. May God in infinite mercy help those of us who have been kept by the power of God until now, to rest in faith in him, and may we be very careful that we slip not with our feet, and decline not with our hearts! Nor let our earnestness end with self, but let us pray with all our might for those who have wandered upon the dark mountains, that they may not wander for another hour; but that at once, ere this service is ended, they may be restored to the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls, and may find rest, as once they used to find it, at the feet of Jesus Christ.

Pray for me, that I may speak in the power of the Holy Spirit, so as to lead back benighted ones who are now stumbling upon the dark mountains. I feel deeply my need of such help, and would breathe my own desire to God in the language of our sweet poetess:—

> "O strengthen me, that while I stand
> Firm on the Rock, and strong in thee,
> I may stretch out a loving hand
> To wrestlers with the troubled sea."

I. I shall keep to the passage before us, and we will commence with it at once, and notice first in the text THE PROCLAMATION. The prophet receives this message: "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord."

It was to be a proclamation, for God is King; and if his subjects rebel he does not lose the rights of his sovereignty. He sends, therefore, to them a royal message with all the power which belongs to the word of a king. "Go and proclaim." It is meant to be a loud summons, such as a proclamation should be when the herald in the name of his royal master publishes a decree. "Go and proclaim." It is to be done in state, with order and regularity, with a purpose, and with authority. And so do I wish to speak at this time. Hear me, O my brother, while I plead with you in Christ's stead. In the name of the Ever-Blessed, who has not lost his right to you, O backslider, you are called upon to return. In his name, who is your Creator and your Lord, is the message sent to you, "Return unto me." It is not delivered as a mere piece of advice from myself personally, which you may treat as you like, because it comes from your friend and your equal; but it comes from your God and your King, to whom you must give an account by-and-by. It is not even sent as a simple word of advice from him, but the majesty of God is at the back of it; at your peril it will be if you trifle with it: I pray you act not so presumptuously. It is a proclamation which demands that every ear should hear it, and that every heart should bow before it. Only traitors will despise our message when the Lord saith to us, "Go and proclaim these words, and say, Return."

This proclamation is sent to the worst of sinners, to the very basest of backsliders. The proclamation is to be given publicly, but it was intended for a certain people, and meant for their hearts as well as their ears. It was meant for those who have backslidden; and the house

of Israel contained many jet-black backsliders. They were people who had gone aside after beholding the most glorious manifestations of God; for unto what people did the God of the whole earth ever reveal himself as he did unto Israel, a people that had been delivered by the plagues of Egypt, that had drunk of water from the rock, and had been fed upon angels' food, a people in the midst of whom the peculiar presence of God had been revealed? He had ransomed them, and fed them, and led them, and taught them, and they had been singularly indulged; and yet, for all that, they had turned aside from the living God. They were a provoking nation of backsliders because they turned aside to the basest idols. After knowing something of him who is invisible, they made a golden calf, and said, "These be thy gods, O Israel"; and in after years they bowed themselves before the lowest and most degrading shapes of idols. They went after the wickednesses, the bestialities of the nations among whom they dwelt, and they defiled themselves so that God, who never speaks too harshly, said, "They went a whoring after the gods of the heathen." They broke their marriage-bonds to the one living and true God, and made themselves loathsome in his sight by the most detestable idolatries. It is sad that there should have been such a race of backsliders; but it is glorious to think that to such as these the message of God's mercy was sent. They were the lowest grade of backsliders; and if there are any here to-night who must be put in the same list, it is to them that the message of God's grace and mercy is to be proclaimed, and I do proclaim it in the name of him that sent me. These backsliders were old offenders, who had long been false to their vows and covenants. They went aside once, and they were chastened, and they repented; but their hearts were not true, and so when the scourge was taken away they went aside again, and proved that deceit was bound up in their souls. Many a time did he forgive them, and put back his wrath; but as often did they return to their provocations. Many and many a time did he smile upon them again in favour, and forgive their transgressions, but they provoked him unto jealousy yet more and more, until he declared that they were bent to backslide from him. It seemed to be the way of them. It was ingrained in their nature. "Israel is a backsliding heifer," saith the Lord. They would not go aright: they would turn aside. Do I address any such in this discourse? O my hearers, may the Lord deal graciously with you by my means, and my heart shall sing for joy! I am not going to enlarge upon any of these points of character, for if the Spirit of God is dealing with you he will enlarge upon them. I have lately met with a considerable number over whom I have both sorrowed and rejoiced: I think of them now with mingled feelings, because God is bringing them very low under a sense of their backslidings, and I am hoping that this will be a blessing to them. The Lord is chastening them, and I trust they will turn at his rebuke. Their sin, which was written with an iron pen upon the very horns of their altars, they did not see, and would not see; but now he says they shall see, and he is making them weep as they see. I know that some of you bleed with an inward wound at the heart, a wound which man cannot reach, which only God can heal. I am glad that it is so, for this will convince you that you shall not be at ease away from God, but that in wandering from him into the far country

there shall come a mighty famine to you, and you shall begin to be in want. Oh, may your want drive you home to the great Father's house, where the best of welcomes awaits you!

The Israelitish people were not only the worst kind of backsliders, but *they had already reaped in a very large measure the result of their backslidings*, for they had been carried away captive. They were taken away to the north country by the king of Assyria, far off from the land of promise which flowed with milk and honey. They were bondslaves under the cruellest of oppressors. They had suffered the loss of all things because they had departed from their God, and yet they had not learned the lesson which affliction was meant to teach them. It was still needful to call them to repentance, and God bade them return to him: his proclamation was to them. I have known men to come down from wealth to poverty through their sin; I have known them fall from health and happiness to disease and misery; I have seen them brought down from honourable associations to degradation and shame wholly as the result of their departing from the living God. While they walked with him, all went well with them; but when they walked contrary to him, he began to walk contrary to them. There are some who hear me at this moment who know the meaning of that text, "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways." They have sinned, and they have smarted, and in the smart this thought has come to their mind, "He will never forgive me. He has beaten me with the blows of a cruel one; he has set me for the target of all his arrows; his arrows drink up the blood of my soul. I am sore wounded and broken in the place of dragons." Ay, so was Israel carried away by Shalmaneser into a distant land, and yet they were bidden to return unto God with a promise of mercy. Captives and poverty-stricken, they sat down, and wept when they remembered Zion, and then came this royal proclamation of reconciliation upon repentance. From the throne whence they might have expected condemnation and the sentence of death, there came this mission, this word, this message, "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord."

I see some mercy, and that of no little kind, in the messenger who was sent to deliver this message, for it was Jeremiah, that man of a broken spirit, who could say of himself, "I am the man that hath seen affliction." Somehow, your bright-eyed joyous spirit astonishes the backslider into greater grief. "Alas," he cries, "such joy I might have known, but I put it all aside!" Such reflections deepen the poor sinner's woe. Moreover, the man that has never been emptied from vessel to vessel, and has had no experience of the bitterness of sin, is too apt to speak proudly, or, at least, harshly and severely, to a wandering brother. He does not sufficiently remember himself, lest he also be tempted. But as for Jeremiah, his eyes were red with weeping, and his cheeks were guttered by his burning tears; and when he spoke, there was a depth of pathos about every word: thus he was qualified to meet mourning souls upon their own ground. How he longed for men to come back to God who had chosen them! How pathetically he exclaimed, "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter

of my people!" And God selected this man that he might go after the smitten ones, and proclaim in stately manner, blended with womanly tenderness, this message, "Return." I do not feel so fitted as Jeremiah, and yet I have an intense desire that any of you who have gone away from God would come back while I speak with you. The Lord knows how this has burdened me of late, for I cannot bear it that you who have sunned yourselves in his smile should choose the darkness; that you who once rejoiced in Christ, and gloried in his cross, should now be crucifying him afresh, and putting him to an open shame. Here is a huge world that "lieth in the wicked one," and we need all our time to try and enlighten it, and, meanwhile, you that are our camp-followers, and, as we thought, our fellow-soldiers, have put up your swords, and gone over to the enemy; at least, you act as if you had, and it pains us. It pains us at the heart. Hear ye, then, at this hour, the proclamation which we will give forth as best we can, looking in your direction if you have gone up to the north, and proclaiming these words towards your place, your cold and shivering place, your place of darkness and of misery, your place in the far-off country. I say, we look anxiously and yet hopefully in your direction, and proclaim these words to you, "Thus saith the Lord, Return."

So far concerning the proclamation.

II. But now, secondly, in our text we find A PRECEPT. It is a very simple one, and as short as it is clear. It is given in the proclamation,—"*Return,* thou backsliding Israel." *Return,*—be as you were; come back: repent, and do your first works. O wanderer, return to thy God! Thou hast forgotten him; thou hast transgressed against him; and thou hast grieved him exceedingly. For these months thou hast not sought him, nor called upon him. Thou hast not trusted him nor confided in him. Thou hast not loved him, nor sought his honour. Return! Thou canst never be right if thou stayest where thou art: all ills attend the man who forsakes his God. Come back—back to the old place of humiliation in his presence, of confession, of childlike faith, of holy consecration; come back to the happy place which was thine when thou wert in thy best estate; yea, further back than that—back nearer to God than ever thou wast before. Return unto thy God.

Hearken: this is the precept; return unto your Saviour; just as you are, come back to him. Come back as you came at first, with your sin acknowledged, looking to his cross for pardon. Did you grow too great, and think you could live without your Saviour? Return! Did you dream of being so perfect that you did not want his righteousness, for your own would suffice? Away with that glittering bauble, that idle notion of thy perfection, and come back, and beat upon thy breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Repent of thy pride, and return again to thy Lord Jesus Christ. He will as gladly receive thee as a mother presses to her bosom a lost child. The road is paved for thy return, the stumbling-blocks are gathered out, the door of the Father's house is open wide. Come yet again, and receive pardon and cleansing from the precious blood of Jesus. It has not lost its power. The fountain of cleansing is open, not only for the common sinner, but for you, the backslider, for remember how the Scripture has it, "A fountain opened *to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.*" It is open

for those that are in the church of God already, as well as for those that are newly brought into it. Come at once, and tarry not. If thy feet be foul with thy wanderings through the mire and through the slough, thy Saviour takes the towel yet again, and fills the basin from the ewer, and stoops to wash thy feet. Wilt thou not have them washed at this moment till he can say to thee again, "Thou art clean every whit"? Thou hast once been washed in the atoning blood, and thou needest not now except to wash thy feet; and when this is done all is well. Go and wash thy brethren's feet in gratitude. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

You see, then, dear friends, how the Lord puts it to you. "Return," for where you lost your roll there you will find it. Mr. Bunyan pictures his pilgrim dropping his passport under the seat in that arbour at the bottom of the hill Difficulty, or half way up it, where he sat down to rest; and where he did not only rest, but fell into a sinful slumber. Under that very settle, whereon you sat, and went to sleep, you will find the roll which you must carry in your bosom to secure you a welcome at the Palace Beautiful. You must go back and look for your spiritual enjoyment where you lost it. Did you lose it by neglect of prayer? Then search the closet through. Did you lose it by a dusty Bible? Dust that Bible, and search its pages till you find it. Did you lose it by neglect of the means of grace? Were your Sabbaths wasted, and week-night services neglected? Then go back, I say again, to the place where by your sin you allowed your holy confidence to slip from you, and there you will find it again. The point at which you diverged from the right road is the point that you must find, and come back to. "Repent, and do your first works," is the Master's call to you to-night. It is his royal proclamation, "Return, thou backsliding Israel."

But listen while I make this proclamation again in God's name. *Return at once.* Delays are always dangerous, but never so dangerous as when they are proposed by backsliders. Return without another day's indulgence in sin. The message tolerates no further backsliding. Come back at once; wait not for second thoughts; your prompt, immediate thoughts are best.

And *come thou back with all thy heart.* Let there be no mimic repentance; no pretended returning. Thou shalt find the Lord if thou seek him with all thy heart, and all thy soul. God help thee to do it now!

And mind that thou *return practically;* that is, that thy life shall be changed, thy idols broken, thy omitted duties fulfilled with eagerness, neglected means of grace pursued with fervour; that done which thou hast left undone, and that evil forsaken into which thou hast gone with such headlong folly. When the Lord says, "Return," he does not mean, "Think about returning, promise to return, talk about your wandering," and all that; but he means that you should practically come back to him with weeping and with supplication, with a true heart believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, and beginning again.

"Alas," says one, "I do not know whether I am a backslider, or whether I have been a hypocrite up till now!" Do not argue that question at all. I am constantly asked to decide for people whether they ever were true Christians, or were in error about their condition.

It is a difficult enquiry, and of small practical value. I say to myself sometimes, "Well, if I never was a child of God I know that I am a sinner, and Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and I will at once trust in him." Thus I recover confidence. If I ever was a child of God, then I am a child of God, and he will bring me back; but if I never was a child of God, and my profession was all a mistake, yet still the free salvation sounds out its silver trumpet—

"Come, and welcome, sinner: come;"

and I hasten to accept the invitation. You can discuss the question of your previous character after you get back into the fold; but, while you are out of it, it does not matter much to you. You had better leave such discussions till you are out of the reach of the wolf. In all probability it would be impossible for you to discover your precise condition; but, O poor soul, this is clear enough, that the Lord cries to thee, "Return, thou backsliding Israel." This precept is clear as noon-day, and it is sent to thee. Come back, with the whole of thy nature, in all ways and respects, back to thy God, and back to thy Saviour, and back to prayer, and back to holy living, and back to the people of God—back to the very church from which thou hast wandered. It will be wise to do that before another sun has risen. Come back to the Lord's Supper, back to feeding spiritually upon his flesh and upon his blood, and living alone in him, and by him, and to him, and with him. God help thee to hear this precept, and to turn it into practical effect!

III. Now, listen, in the third place, to THE PROMISE, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith Jehovah, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you." "*I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you.*" See that anger, like a black cloud, charged not with refreshing rain, but with fire flakes that shall burn as they fall: ay, burn their way into the very core of your being, as with the fires of hell. A sense of wrath is hell setting the soul on fire, till conscience flames with its own peculiar fierceness, and seems to anticipate the fire that never can be quenched. You see that gathering storm around you, do you not? But here is the fair promise, "Return, and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you." Not a flake of it shall burn you if you return unto your God. There is forgiveness, there is full, and free, and immediate forgiveness to be had. "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins. Return unto me." This is a grand motive for coming back: the sin that separates is put away. He will wash you thoroughly from your iniquity, and cleanse you from your sin, and whatsoever you need he will give to you, and he will not upbraid you. When the father received the prodigal, did he remind him of his ingratitude, or of his wasting of his substance? Not a word of it: he kissed away the memory of his wrong-doing. He covered him with a robe of righteousness, and he put a new song into his mouth. The Lord is prepared to do that with you at this moment. I know that your doubts and fears ask the question again and again, "Can it be possible?" All things are possible with God, and especially all deeds of mercy; for his mercy endureth for ever, and he delights in it. I know that you say, "Oh, but does the promise mean me, even me?" It means you, even you. You are a backslider; you plead guilty to the charge; and therefore it is to you that the promise

is given. Accept the mercy. The man that is condemned by that description—the "backslider"—is the man who is commanded to return, and he is the man to whom the promise is made, "I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you." In all this you can see yourself as in a looking-glass.

I find that the passage might be read, "I will not cause my face to fall upon you," meaning this—that if the child of God comes back, God will not look angry at him any more. This is a very great blessing; for when the Lord does not lay punishment upon his people by way of judgment and wrath, yet he does often hide his face from them, or frowns upon them like a cruel one. If you have sinned, God cannot smile upon you; he must chasten you. His own words are, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: *therefore* I will punish you for all your iniquities." You are a child, and therefore you must be whipped if you do wrong: love ensures you the chastisement. "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." But the great Father here shows that he will not continue to frown on you: he will not make his face to fall at the mention of you. He has said, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." He might justly say, "You are my child, but I cannot speak comfortably to you, for you are so disobedient that I must send you to a distance, and make you feel the evil of disobedience." But, instead of that, he says, "I will not cause my anger to fall upon you. I will not even cause my face to fall at the sight of you; but I will receive you graciously; I will in tender mercy put away your transgressions, and reveal my love to you." "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." Will you not come to him, when he speaks thus?

"Return!
O erring, yet beloved!
I wait to bind thy bleeding feet, for keen
And rankling are the thorns where thou hast been;
I wait to give thee pardon, love, and rest.
Is not My joy to see thee safe and blest?
Return! I wait to hear once more thy voice,
To welcome thee anew, and bid thy heart rejoice."

A woman has a husband who has loved her as his own, but she has lent her ear to a serpent—to one who with words of flattery has beguiled her, and she has sinned against her fidelity. She has defiled herself with another, and she has gone away, far away, and the man who has deceived her has forsaken her. She is now a woman of a sorrowful spirit, broken down and cast off. A friend whispers to her, "Return unto your husband, for it was better with you then than now." But this is her stumbling-block: "Will he receive me? Can he receive me? I have dishonoured him. Will he take me back again? Can I expect the love that gladdened my girlish days to be lavished upon me again? Will he not call me outcast, and say that I have darkened his house, and shall never enter it again?" But if the message comes to her, "He will receive you graciously, and love you freely," will she not hasten home? When she learns that the anger which he felt is gone, and

that his heart yearns towards her, will she not fly home as on the wings of the wind? Unless she has become a monster of wantonness, she will seek the man whom she has grieved, and at his feet she will fall in gratitude for his forgiveness. The parable is concerning ourselves who have backslidden from the Lord Jesus Christ. Shall we not also return now that we hear him thus inviting us to come back—yea, making a royal proclamation of his grace? "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you." The Lord grant that this word may go home to those whom he has ordained to bless.

IV. I pass on, in the next place, fourthly, to notice THE ARGUMENT. The argument here used is twofold, and you will recollect the two arguments all the more readily because they begin with the same letter—Mercy and Marriage. We have in the twelfth verse, "For I am *merciful*, saith the Lord"; and in the fourteenth verse, "For I am *married* unto you."

Here is, first, *God's mercy*. Nothing delights God more than to forgive sin: at this blessed work he is at home. To some men it is a hard task to forgive an injury. They do it with a squeeze, and a twist, and a wrench: and even then it is questionable if it be done at all, for forced forgiveness is no forgiveness. Some are not unlike the dying man who said to the priest, "If I die you will recollect that I forgive Pat Maloney, but if I live I'll pay him out as soon as I can." Many forgive because they cannot revenge; their virtue is the result of their inability to be vicious. But, with God, it is his nature to forgive: he is love, and mercy is a drop from the honeycomb of love. God must be just; but to punish is his left-handed labour, while to forgive is his right-handed work. He is happy at it; he finds pleasure in man's turning to him, and finding life. Mercy was his last-born attribute. Until sin came there was no room for mercy—the mercy that forgives, and therefore mercy is God's Benjamin, the son of his right hand, and he delights to give to it ten times as much as to his other attributes when they feast together. It is written, "He delighteth in mercy," but I never read that he delights in justice, or delights in wisdom, or delights in power: he delights in mercy. God is charmed when he can wash a scarlet sinner white. It is the heaven of his heaven to receive a hell-black sinner to his heart, and put away his sin. "I am merciful," saith the Lord.

Did I hear a trembling voice exclaim, "Oh, but you do not know what I have done, sir"? No, and "sir" does not want to know; but then I know that the Lord delighteth in mercy. Perhaps you had better not tell those midnight deeds, those sins that have defiled you through and through: the confessional is by no means a healthy place; the smell of it is putrid. Confess to God, and not to me. You have lain in the dye till you are soaked and saturated in sin; you are dyed ingrain with the scarlet of iniquity; but the Lord delights to take out these glaring stains. Things which are impossible with man are the joy of God. Therefore come to him, and believe in his mercy; and doubt no longer, but lovingly receive what he lovingly gives.

As for you who once knew him, and loved him, and rejoiced in him, I want you just to dwell on that second argument, namely, *marriage*.

"For I am married unto you, saith the Lord." Oh, those were blessed days when you used to sing—

"'Tis done, the great transaction's done!
I am my Lord's, and he is mine.
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice divine."

And then you used to join with all of us in singing—

"Happy day! happy day!
When Jesus washed my sins away."

Ah, poor soul, where have you been since that? You have been where you ought not to have been, and now your Bridegroom says, "Return, for I am married unto you. You may have put off the ring, but you are mine for all that, and I will have you come back to me. Return." The bonds that Christ makes are not to be broken. The favour that Christ has shown is not to be removed. Stronger than death and hell is the love of Christ, and who shall separate us from it? Notwithstanding all your sins and iniquities, he says, "Return, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord." It is done, and though *you* do not stand to it *he* does, the great transaction still stands on his part: though you believe not, he abideth faithful. He has bought you with his blood, and the price will never return into his veins. He has loved you with an everlasting love, and therefore it cannot cease. In that love he will ever rest, nor from his oath return. Wherefore, come back to him.

"Return!
O fallen, yet not lost!
Canst thou forget the life for thee laid down,
The taunts, the scourging, and the thorny crown?
When o'er thee first my spotless robe I spread,
And poured the oil of joy upon thy head,
How did thy wakening heart within thee burn!
Canst thou remember all, and wilt thou not return?

"Return!
O chosen of my love!
Fear not to meet thy beckoning Saviour's view;
Long ere I called thee by thy name, I knew
That very treacherously thou wouldst deal;
Now I have seen thy ways, yet I will heal.
Return! Wilt thou yet linger far from me?
My wrath is turned away, I have redeemèd thee."

V. And I finish (for time has failed me) by noticing THE ADVICE that he here gives as to how we are to return. He says, "*Only acknowledge thine iniquity.*" "Oh," you have said, "I cannot get back to God: it is such a long way back to him. I feel that I have to set myself right, and in that process to pass through a world of sorrow." Yet the Lord says, "Only acknowledge." I rejoice in those blessed "*onlys*" of the Bible! "Only acknowledge thine iniquity." "Alas, I have so wandered!" Acknowledge it. "But I have done it so many times!" Acknowledge it. "But I have wandered against light and knowledge!" Acknowledge it. It is not a hard thing to do, to get thee to thy chamber, and before God confess thy faults. You have, first of all, to have a knowledge of it, and then to *ac*-knowledge it. Feel thy

sin, and then confess it. Be convinced of it, and then plead guilty at the judgment-seat. Do not attempt to excuse it, or to make apologies for it. As long as you do so, you will never get peace; but let this perilous stuff be purged from off your soul by a clear, plain acknowledgment, such as David made when he said, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness." He had tried to call his crime by other names, but his forgiveness came when he owned that it was murder. When we know our sin, God will make us to know his grace: but if we are self-righteous, our pride will be our ruin.

"What am I to acknowledge?" Acknowledge chiefly three things.

Your breach of covenant—that you have transgressed against Jehovah your God. You professed to be a child of God, a member of Christ, a temple of the Holy Ghost, and you have been false to all these avowals. You have broken your vows, you have been false to your baptism, false to your communion at the Lord's Supper, false to your church-membership, false to your prayers. Go and tell the Lord all this, and acknowledge that you have transgressed against Jehovah your God.

Next acknowledge *your greedy sin*—that thou "hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree." Israel had sinned wherever she had an opportunity,—sinned openly. You would not have thought that she would have dared to do it—sinned again and again, till as many as there were trees in the grove were her adulteries with idol gods. Confess you this crime if it be indeed true: "Lord, I have sinned with both hands since I have departed from thee. I have committed sins of the eyes, and sins of the feet, and sins of the hand, sins of the head, and sins of the heart, sins against thy holy law, sins against thy love and blood, sins immense and innumerable. I might as well hope to count the drops that make the ocean, as to tell the number of my sins." Make this confession heartily and explicitly. Do not stutter over it, and try to lessen it; but bring it straight out in deep humility. As a backslider you have done far more evil than you know of, and there is no fear of your exaggerating your guilt.

And I finish with this: "*Thou hast not obeyed my voice, saith the Lord.*" That is to say, you have been guilty of *sins of omission.* This is sufficient to swamp any one of us. Our sins of commission may be few, but as for our omissions, these would sink me, I know, past all hope, were it not for the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ. Dear friend, hasten to acknowledge your omissions.

Confess also your *hardness of heart.* God has spoken, and you would not hear; he has entreated, and you would not regard him; he has come very near to you, and you have turned your back upon him. Thus he complains of you, "I have spoken, and ye would not hear. Ye have not obeyed my voice."

Confess also *your ingratitude.* His voice, which is your Father's voice, you have not heard or obeyed. What unnaturalness! Shall a wife not know her husband's voice? Shall a brother forget his brothers? Yet it is so with some of you who once used to be with us: you were our joy, and we were your joy, and God the joy of us both; but you have gone aside; you have left your first love; you have departed from the ways of the Lord. Yet remember at this moment there are no judgments for you; no threats, no scolding words for you,

but simply this: "Only return." The heart of love has room in it for you. Hasten home to him who is your only resting-place. You never can be happy where you are, and as you are. You have tried it. Oh, how long you have tried it, but you are going downward, and waxing worse and worse. Oh, that you would say, "I will end it: I will end it. Never more will I depart from him who has redeemed me with his blood. I will yield myself to him at once." Happy is the preacher if this has been effected by the Spirit of God. Happy shall you be, also; and happy are these Christian folk to know that such a thing has been done in their midst. God bless you, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jeremiah iii. 12—25.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—373, 476, 521.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

MR. SPURGEON has not been very well for the last few days, but he is now much better, and feels assured of returning to his work with renewed energy. He begs his friends to pray for this desirable blessing; and also for the blessing of God upon the Conference of the Pastors' College, which will take place in the beginning of May. It is of the utmost importance that the pastors then assembled should be filled with the Spirit of God. The times are evil; the gospel is needed; the Spirit of God can alone make it effectual; let all the saints mightily pray for a divine visitation. Mr. SPURGEON'S College work also needs to be aided by the liberality of his friends at this time, and he would remind them of it very hopefully.

Mentone, March 27, 1885.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

TO LOVERS OF JESUS: AN EXAMPLE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, APRIL 12TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

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"She hath wrought a good work on me."—Mark xiv. 6.

THIS holy woman had *displeased the disciples*. She must have been very sorry to do that. She would not have wilfully grieved the least servant of her Lord. But she did so without the slightest blame on her part: it was the unexpected consequence of a most blessed action, and the fault lay with those who complained of her holy deed, and not with her. I do not know whether all the disciples felt grieved, but we are told by Matthew that "they had indignation," and he seems to speak of them as a body; from which I gather that those who love Jesus much must not measure their conduct by that of Christ's ordinary disciples, indeed it might fare ill with them even if apostles became their judges. They must not tone down the fervour of their zeal to the lukewarmness of the general order of Christian men: they must not measure the consecration of their lives by the little which many professors present upon the altar to God. No, my brother, or sister, you must not be too much distressed if the best of the household misjudge you, for it has happened to many favoured ones before you. Thou, O man, greatly beloved, canst not abide to be lukewarm, and be not thou surprised if the lukewarm cannot agree with thee! Count it no strange thing if, in thy ardour, thou shouldest come to be accused of fanaticism, want of prudence, rashness, forwardness. Do not break thy heart over it, if they should even call thee mad, or suspect that thou hast more zeal than knowledge; for Mary, whom we would be glad to imitate, came under this kind of censure; and David, and thy Lord, the Son of David, were each thought to be madmen.

This honoured woman performed a notable act, which is to be rehearsed wherever the gospel is preached, and yet thereby she stirred the wrath of the brotherhood of the disciples: of how small account is the judgment of men!

Chiefly she called down upon her head the censure of Judas. As far

as Judas was known to his brethren he was reckoned among the best of them. They never suspected him of playing the traitor, or they would have cavilled at his being their treasurer: they once had indignation at James and John, but the canny Judas had their respect. I should think he was the most business-like man of the whole company —which is not saying much for business, is it? He was a leading spirit among that little band. He was one who would be selected because of his prudence—and that is not saying much for prudence, is it? Doubtless Judas abounded in that cool, calculating shrewdness which makes a man fit to deal with moneys and purchases. He had far more business ability than impetuous Peter, or affectionate John, or thoughtful Thomas. He was the right man in the right place, if he had but happened to have been an honest man. Wonderful it was that he could conceal the deep meanness of his spirit from all his fellows during the years in which they lived together; but he had done so, and therefore his opinion carried weight with it. Among the apostles the censure of Judas meant the calm condemnation of a judicious person. His judgment was not what you and I would esteem it to be, for we should think nothing of his censure now, because we know that he betrayed his Lord; but the disciples could not foresee this, and in their judgment that which Judas would condemn must be very censurable; at least it must be unbusinesslike; it must lack common sense; it must be imprudent and wasteful. Was not Judas the perfect model of economy? Was he not the sort of man who in these days many a father would point out to his boy as an example? Hear him say, "Boy, if you want to get on in the world, imitate Judas Iscariot; he is the model man; he is a Christian, and yet he has a keen eye for his own advantage, and is a sharp man of business."

It was a hard thing for a timid woman to bear such a censure from one so highly respected in the college of apostles; but she had this solace, which I will warrant you put quite out of her mind all care about the censure of disciples, even of the biggest of them: *she pleased her Master*. She could see by the very look of him that he accepted what his followers condemned. She knew in her conscience that she had the approbation of the Lord, even though she had the disapprobation of the servants. And oh, brothers and sisters, let us always carry our case into the highest court, and live before the Lord, and not as the slaves of men! If we are conscious that we have sincerely done what we have done as unto the Lord, and if we feel sure that *he* has approved our service, it is of the smallest consequence possible what men shall say of us. Let us never provoke our brethren to be ill-tempered to us, neither let us do anything that can be rightly censured; but if we have gone somewhat beyond common custom in the fervour of our spirit, let us reply with young David to his envious brethren, "Is there not a cause?" The opinions of other men are no rule to us: we have our own obligations to discharge, and as our debt of love is larger than usual, let us take liberty to be as full of love and zeal as we can be; only regretting that we cannot go still further in the way of sacred service.

"Well," says one, "but do those who love Christ encounter the frowns of men at this time?" Oh, yes, and of their own Christian brethren too! If you consort with the common ruck of brethren, and travel on

the road to heaven so slowly that it is a question whether you are going there at all, then you will escape criticism: if you keep with those who practise the snail's march they will call you a good easy man, a right respectable person. But if you run for it, if you put out all the energy of your nature, and are determined to live at a high pitch for Christ, you will get the cold shoulder, even from many of his disciples, for you will be practically condemning their half-heartedness; and who are you to be such a troubler in Israel? The more prudent among your brethren will say that your pride and the naughtiness of your heart make you so forward and presumptuous, and they will try to put you down, or put you out. You cannot commit a greater crime against some people than to be more useful than they are. When a person reckons himself to be the standard of holiness, he looks upon one who excels him as guilty of a kind of blasphemy. If you outrun others do not reckon upon smiles, but count upon black looks. You will be called impudent and thought impertinent. Bear it all and fret not. Go thou to thy Lord, and tell him that thou hast done and art doing all thou canst *as unto him*, and entreat him to smile upon thee. Crave his acceptance of thy poor doings, and then go thou about thy business, occupying till he shall come. Sow thou the seed of duty, and care not whether in human judgment it shines or rains. "He that regardeth the clouds shall not reap;" if thou regardest not the clouds at all, thou wilt do thy sowing and thy reaping with the comfort of true faith, and God will bless thee.

I am going to talk about this blessed woman at this time with this hopeful desire—that you and I may imitate her ever-memorable example. I shall have nothing to say but to open up the meaning of our Lord, as far as I know it, when he said, "She hath wrought a good work on me," or "in me." The passage might be rendered—only the translators do not like to use the term—"She hath wrought a beautiful work on me"—a comely work. "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." This was a thing of beauty, which is a joy for ever to the church of God, in that constant memorial of her which is blended with the preaching of the gospel of Christ; for as long as the gospel is proclaimed this Mary of Bethany shall have a memorial, because of what she did.

What was there beautiful about her work—the breaking of the alabaster vase, and the pouring out of the liquid nard? What was there beautiful about that? I will try to show you.

I. There were seven beauties in it, and the first and chief beauty, perhaps, was that IT WAS ALTOGETHER A GLORIFYING OF JESUS. She meant when she poured that ointment on his head to honour *him* personally; every drop of it was for himself, out of reverence for his actual personality.

She was not so much thinking of his deeds of love, or of his words of truth, as of his own unrivalled and most precious self. She had seen his deeds of love when Lazarus was raised, she had heard his words of truth when she sat at his feet: but now she felt an adoring reverence for his thrice blessed person, and she brought that box of precious spikenard, and offered it to him as her Teacher, her Friend, her Lord, her all. Suggestion was made that she should have sold it and given it to the poor; but she longed to present one offering *to him* direct, and not by

any roundabout method. Doubtless she was not behindhand in her gifts to the poor, but she felt that when she had done *that* she had not satisfied the cravings of her grateful heart towards *him* who had become poorest of the poor for her sake. She wanted to give something *to him* —something suitable for such an One as she conceived him to be—something suitable for the time and circumstances then present with regard to him. I think this holy woman knew more about our Lord than all his apostles put together. Her eyes had peered within the veil. You remember that only a day or two after this he rode in triumph through Jerusalem a proclaimed King. Should he not first be anointed? And who would anoint him to the kingdom visibly with oil but this consecrated woman? She was come to give him a royal anointing preparatory to his proclamation in the streets of his capital city? At any rate her spikenard must be poured out alone *for him*. She forgot the poor just then as she quite forgot the disciples. Martha was busy at the table waiting upon them all, disciples and Master; but Mary had concentrated all her thoughts on Jesus. She "saw no man save Jesus only." Blessed exclusiveness of vision! What she did must not be for Peter and James and John with Jesus, but it must be for him alone, who indeed is alone, above and beyond all others, worthy of a homage all his own. Because she had a love for him beyond all others that she had ever heard of, her heart must find expression in a deed of love which must be entirely, wholly, only towards himself.

Now, this is as we have read the text—a beautiful thing. It will be beautiful on your part and mine if, having taken care of the poor according to our ability, having discharged the claims of our relationships to our fellow-men, we then feel that we must do something for Jesus,—distinctly for our Lord. Do you ask me what you shall do for him? Nay, but, sister, I must not tell you; your own heart must originate the thought, as your own hand must carry it out. "Oh," cries a brother, "tell me what I could do for Jesus!" Nay, but, brother, I must not tell you. The better part of the whole matter will lie in the hallowed ingenuity of your spirit in inventing something for him out of your own fervent soul. The holy woman's deed had been somewhat spoiled if there had been a command for her to bring the alabaster box, and pour the ointment on his head: her love commanded her, and that was better than a formal precept. Her deed had not possessed half its worth if Simon had suggested to her, "I have not sufficient spikenard to anoint our guests; fetch you a box from home." The very glory of it lay in the spontaneous suggestion of her own heart that she must do a something which should be all for Jesus.

She must do it herself personally, and not by proxy; and she must do it unto him distinctly, directly, openly. Others might smell the spikenard. That she did not wish to prevent; but still the perfume was never meant for them, but for him exclusively. She poured it on *his* head; she poured it on *his* feet; she would anoint *him* from head to foot with this token of her intense and reverent gratitude, and her boundless love: she felt wrapped up in *him*, her Lord and her God; and so her willing offering was for him, and for him alone. What a joy to be permitted to do anything for him whose great love holds us fast! I feel as if I would fain at once retire from you all to indulge my heart in this rare luxury.

Alas, good Lord, how little hast thou of this devotion in these calculating days! Instead of "all for Jesus," how seldom we do anything for Jesus! Brethren, when you sing your hymns, do you "sing a hymn to Jesus"? When you are in prayer, do you pray *to* Jesus, and *for* Jesus? Is it not written, "Prayer also shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised"? When you come to this communion table, I pray that you may forget all that are with you in this assembly, and cry, "I will remember *thee*." In the chief place, at any rate, let Jesus fill your thoughts. Set him alone upon the throne, and think only of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, and receiving him into your very self, that there may be a vital union between the Christ of God and your own souls. To my mind this is the beauty of our fellowship in the Holy Supper, that we feed on Jesus only. Let us make him our soul's sole meat and drink; and then let us live for him. My heart craves now to know what I shall do that I may imitate her who gave to "Jesus only" that box of spikenard, very costly. Oh, ye lovers of my Lord who have been washed in his precious blood, who owe your all to him, think of his matchless beauties now, and as ye look up into that face where shines your heaven, think to yourselves, "What can we do for him—for him absolutely, directly, and personally?" There is the first beauty of this woman's act of homage: it was for Jesus, for Jesus only, for Jesus wholly.

II. A second beauty lay in this: that IT WAS AN ACT OF PURE LOVE, altogether of love to Jesus. The other woman—blessed was she also among women—I refer to that woman who was a sinner: she also came and brought an alabaster box, and did much the same thing as this Mary of Bethany. But she did what Mary did not do: she mingled weeping with her ointment: she washed his feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. That was a beautiful act in its own way, but Mary's deed is a beautiful thing in another way. In this lies the distinction: there does not seem to have been in Mary's act any remembrance of personal sin, though, doubtless, that feeling was in her heart, and had brought her to the higher stage of adoration of her pardoning Lord. Her sin was put away long ago. Mary had sat at Jesus' feet, and had chosen the good part, and the matter of pardon for sin had been transacted a long while before; and now, although in her heart there is deep gratitude for it, and for the raising of her dear brother Lazarus, yet it seems to be quite absorbed in the deeper thought of her soul, for she had attained to an all-consuming love of himself. She never would have known that kind of love if she had not learned to sit at his feet; but to sit long there has a wonderful operation on the human mind: it causes even things that are good in themselves to be overshadowed by matters that are higher and less in relation to self. It is a blessed thing to love Christ because we escape from hell by him; it is a blessed thing to love Christ because he has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers; but it is a still higher thing to forget yourself, and to contemplate with delight the ineffable perfections of him whom heaven and earth acknowledge to be chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. "We love him because he first loved us;" here we begin, and this beginning always remains; but on it we pile tier after tier of precious stones of love, which are crowned with pinnacles of inexpressible affection for the great Lord himself. He

in himself has won our hearts, and carried our spirits by storm, and now we must do something which shall express our love to him. That love is not alone a gratitude for benefits received from him, but an intense affection for his glorious, adorable person.

Come, dear friends, do you feel that kind of emotion in your hearts at this time? Do you even now feel that so perfectly has Christ won the verdict of your understanding, so completely has he bound in silken fetters every movement of your affections, that you want to be doing something which shall have but this one aim, to express your love to him who has made you what you are? Indulge the emotion, crown it with action, continue it through life. In this point be not slow to be imitators of the sister of Martha and Lazarus. O sweet love of Jesus, come and fill our souls to the brim, and run over in delicate personal service!

III. The third beauty of the action was that IT WAS DONE WITH CONSIDERABLE SACRIFICE. There was an expense about it, and that of no trifling character to a woman who was neither queen nor princess. I shall always feel obliged to Judas for figuring up the price of that box of costly nard. He did it to blame her, but we will let his figures stand, and think the more of her the more he put down to the account of waste. I should never have known what it cost, nor would you either, if Judas had not marked down in his pocket-book that it "might have been sold for much." How he grudged that "much." He calculated the value at three hundred pence. He did well to put it in pence, for his sordid soul revelled in small moneys which make up the pounds. Pence, indeed, when the expense is for him to whom the silver and the gold belong! Yet I like his calculation in pence, for it is suggestive, since a Roman penny was a day's wages; and take a day's wages now—say 4s.—and you get some £60. It was a large sum of money for a woman in her state of life in Bethany. It was £10 of their money, but money then was of a different value from what it is now, and it was a great sum for her to expend in one single deed of love. Her gift was costly, and the Lord Jesus deserved to be served at the best rate, and at the highest cost. There was a woman who served the Lord at a higher rate than this: she only spent two mites in the doing of it, but then you know it was all that she had. I do not know how much Mary had, but I feel persuaded that it was pretty well all she had, and that all she could get together seemed to her to be far too little for the Lord Jesus Christ. If his head was to be anointed, plenty of ordinary oil might have been procured at Bethany. The Mount of Olives was hard by. But she would have scorned the thought of pouring common olive oil on him: she must find an imperial unguent such as Cæsar might have accepted. If he is to be anointed, there is nard to be bought in the bazaars at Jerusalem at a very reasonable rate. Why must you, Mary, seek after this liquid ointment of the East, this otto distilled from myriads of roses, of which it needs leagues of gardens to make a drop? Why must you buy the "very precious" nard, and spend such a deal of money upon that which will only last half an hour, and then the wind will have carried it away, and its perfume will have vanished? Ay, but the glory of service to Christ is to serve him with the best of the best! He deserves, if we serve him with sermons, that we preach the best discourses mind can frame or tongue

deliver; or if we serve him with teaching in the class, he deserves that we teach in the tenderest fashion, and feed his lambs with the best of the grass; or if we serve him with the pen, that we write not a line that may need to be erased; or if we serve him with money, that we give with liberality of the best we have, and much of it. We must see to it that in everything we do not serve Christ with the lean sheep of the flock, or with such as are wounded, and broken, and torn by beasts; but that he hath the fat of our offerings. We should not be content if we are rich to give him out of our estate the cheese-parings and candle-ends, such as we dare not keep back for very shame. Usual donations have little beauty in them—those moneys dragged out of people by importunity—that guinea dribbled out by custom because it is a respectable amount. There is nothing to satisfy love in the slender oblations which come forth like an unwilling taxation, which a miser could scarce withhold. But oh, to give to the Lord Jesus freely, richly, whatever it is with which he has entrusted us, whether it be gold or genius, time or words—whether it be the minted coinage of the purse, or the living courage of a loving heart, or the labour of an earnest hand! Let us give our Well-beloved the best we have, and he will call it beautiful. Mary's gift was all for him, and all for love, and it was done at great expense, and therefore it was beautiful.

IV. Next, remember, that part of the beauty of Mary's action lay in this, that IT WAS DONE WITH PREPARATION. We are told by John what we should not else have known, "Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." "*Kept* this." It was not that seeing Jesus there at the feast, and being seized with a sudden thought, she rushed back to her stores, and fetched out the little vase of spikenard, and broke it in a passion of affection, which in cooler moments she might regret. Far from it: she was now consummating the long thought of weeks and months. We have known warm-spirited brethren and sisters both say and do and give grandly, under a certain spur and impulse, what they never thought of doing when they entered into the assembly. I shall not blame them; rather do I commend them for obeying gracious impulses; but it is not the best way of doing service to our ever-blessed Master. Passion seldom gives so acceptably as principle. Mary did not perform a thoughtless action under a tempestuous force of unusual zeal. No, she had *kept* this. She had kept this choice unguent on purpose till a fitting time should come for putting it to its most appropriate use. My own belief is that, when she sat at Jesus' feet, she learned much more than any of the disciples had ever gathered from his public preaching. She had heard him say that the Son of man would be delivered to the scribes and Pharisees, and that he would be spat upon and scourged, and they would put him to death, and the third day he would rise again; and she believed it. She thought it over, and she studied it, and made out more of the meaning of it than any one of the apostles had done. She said to herself—He is going to die as a sacrifice at the hands of wicked men, and I will, therefore, render him special honour. I should not wonder if she began to read the Old Testament with that light, "This is he whom God hath sent, upon whom he hath laid the iniquities of us all, and he shall be given up to judgment, and he shall bear the sin of many." Then she thought within herself, "If that is so, I will get the

spikenard ready to anoint him for his burial." Perhaps she intended as much as that, for so the Lord himself interpreted the deed. At any rate, she thought, "Alas, for my Lord! If he dies he will need to be embalmed, and I will be ready to aid in his burial." Therefore she *kept this.*

"Against the day of my burying hath she kept this." Brethren, there is great beauty in an action which is the outcome of a long time of loving careful consideration. It is ill to delay a good deed which might be done at once; but if a deed must be delayed, it is well to be doing it at once by preparing for it. When a person feels, "The time is not yet, but I will be prepared when it does come," it shows that the heart is occupied with a love of a very engrossing character. We sing—

"Oh, what shall I do
My Saviour to praise?"

And it were well if the question were constantly in our minds. Let each man resolve in his heart,—I will not offer my Lord the hasty fruit of impulse, or that which shall cost me nothing, but I will consider what I can do for him. Of what will there be a need? In what direction can I do him homage where else he might lack that honour? I will turn it over, and meditate, and consider, and then I will perform. This last the preacher would repeat with emphasis, for oh, my brothers, it is a custom with many of us to get a grand thought and then as we turn it over to let it evaporate without its leaving even a drop of practical result behind! This holy woman was no mere planner and purposer, but a doer of holy deeds. She could keep her alabaster box as long as was prudent, and yet she did not arrive at the tempting conclusion to keep it altogether. She allowed her heart to weigh the project; and the more she weighed it, she became the more resolved to do it—to do it when the due time came. When she believed that the hour had come she did not delay for an instant. She was as prompt as she had been thoughtful. The Passover was drawing very near; it was within six days, and so she brought out what she had held in reserve. Blessed are the punctualities of service which are the result of earnest endeavour to honour the Lord in the best possible way.

There is something beautiful in seeing, as we have seen, some poor woman saving her littles, and putting them by for years till she could accomplish a secret purpose by which Jesus would be glorified. It is striking to see, as you and I did see, a woman of moderate wealth discarding all the comforts of life that she might save sufficient that there might be an orphanage in which children might be cared for; not, as she said, for the children's sake, but for Christ's sake, that *he* might be glorified. The Stockwell Orphanage is the alabaster box which a devout woman presented to her Lord. Her memory is blessed. Its perfume is recognized in all parts of the earth at this moment, to the glory of the Lord she loved. Such a thoughtful deed is what Jesus would call a beautiful thing. Let us abound in such beautiful things. For a man to say, "There will come a crisis when I shall have to stand out for God and his truth, and it will be a serious loss to me," and then so to ponder it as to be almost eager for the occasion, is a beautiful thing. To feel like the Lord Jesus, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and

how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" is a beautiful thing. Courageous, self-sacrificing decision for the truth is a beautiful thing, when its action is well considered, and carried out with enthusiasm. God give us to mix thought and impulse, reason and affection, and thus serve him both with the mind and the heart!

V. There is a fifth point of beauty. MARY DID HER GREAT DEED WITHOUT A WORD. Dear sisters, you will pardon me for commending this holy woman for her wise and fitting silence all through her gracious act. She did not talk about it beforehand, she said not a word while she did it, and she said nothing afterwards. Martha was the worker, and rather the talker too; but I think that all you will find Mary saying is, "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died;" and she was so scant of words that she had to borrow those from Martha. Martha said a great deal more than that; but Mary was quite satisfied to be as brief as possible. She was a great thinker, a great sitter at Jesus' feet, and a great learner, but not a great talker. When the time came she was a great worker, for it is very curious, though Martha bears the palm for work in our ordinary talk, yet Mary, the thinker, did more than Martha, the worker. "She," said Christ, "hath wrought a good work on me," which he never said of Martha, good as Martha was. He a little censured the elder sister for being cumbered with much serving; but Mary's work he commended, and decreed that it should be remembered as long as the world stands. Though she does not bear the name of a worker in the vulgar judgment, yet is she the queen in the kingdom of good works. Yet, I remind you, she did not say a word. There is such a thing as spoiling what you do by making so great a fuss before you do it, that when the mouse is born people are only astonished that such a small creature should be the only fruit of the dreadful throes of the mountain. Moreover, there is such a thing as talking so much afterwards of what we have done that it spoils it all. It seems as if we must let all the world know something about ourselves; whereas the joy and bliss of it all is not to let yourself be seen, but to let the oil go streaming upon the Master till he is anointed with perfume, and we ourselves sink back into our natural insignificance. Silent acts of love have musical voices in the ear of Jesus. Sound no trumpet before thee, or Jesus will take warning and be gone.

If we could all *do* more and *talk* less it might be a blessing to ourselves at least, perhaps to others. Let us labour in our service for the Lord to be more and more hidden; as much as the proud desire to catch the eye of man, let us endeavour to avoid it.

"I should like to know," says one, "how to do holy work." Go and do it, and consult not with flesh and blood. "I have done my work, and now I should dearly like to hear what you think of it." You should rise above such idle dependence upon man's opinion; what matters it to you what your fellow-servant thinks? To your own Master you stand or fall. If you have done a good thing do it again. You know the story of the man who comes riding up to the captain, and says, "Sir, we have taken a gun from the enemy." "Go and take another," said the matter-of-fact officer. That is the best advice which I can render to a friend who is elated with his own success. So much remains to be accomplished that we have no time to consider what has been done. If

we have done holy service, let us do it a second time, and do it a third time, and continue to do it, ever praying the Lord to accept our persevering service. In any case let our consecrated life be for our Lord's eye alone, a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Anything like sounding a trumpet before us is hateful to the lowly Lord; secresy has a charm for Jesus, and the more carefully we preserve it the better.

VI. Next, and sixthly, there was this beauty about the action of Mary —that SHE DID IT IN REFERENCE TO OUR LORD'S DEATH. The disciples shrank from thinking of that sad subject. Peter said, "That be far from thee, Lord." But Mary, bearing her Master's heart very near her own, and sympathizing with him in his glorious enterprise, instead of drawing back from the thought of that death, performed her work in connection with it. I am not certain to what degree she was conscious that it was so, but there is the fact,—the anointing had reference to the burial of the Lord. It seems to me that the best and tenderest duty that Christians do for their Lord Jesus is that which is touched with the blood-mark—which bears the stamp of the cross. The best preaching is, "We preach Christ crucified." The best living is, "We are crucified with Christ." The best man is a crucified man. The best style is a crucified style: may we drop into it! The more we live beholding our Lord's unutterable griefs, and understanding how he has fully put away our sin, the more holiness shall we produce. The more we dwell where the cries of Calvary can be heard, where we can view heaven, and earth, and hell, all moved by his wondrous passion—the more noble will our lives become. Nothing puts life into men like a dying Saviour. Get you close to Christ, and carry the remembrance of him about you from day to day, and you will do right royal deeds. Come, let us slay sin, for Christ was slain. Come, let us bury all our pride, for Christ was buried. Come, let us rise to newness of life, for Christ has risen. Let us be united with our crucified Lord in his one great object; let us live and die with him, and then every action of our lives will be very beautiful.

VII. The seventh beauty, to my mind, is this: you may think it a little far fetched, but I cannot help mentioning it, for it touches my heart. I believe that MARY HAD IN THIS ANOINTING OF THE SAVIOUR SOME LITTLE GLIMPSE OF HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD, and of his after existence. For I would ask of you,—Why do nations at all embalm their dead? Why not consume them in the fire? A mysterious something makes the ordinary Christian man shudder at the thought of cremation. That must surely be an acquired taste: unsophisticated nature does not court the furnace, or covet the flame; we prefer to lie beneath the green hillock with our fathers. Many nations of antiquity, and especially the Egyptians and other orientals, took great care to anoint the bodies of the departed with precious perfumes, and to lay them asleep in gums and fine linen. What for? Because there darkly shone upon their minds some thought of the hereafter. There remained with man, long after the fall, a glimmering, undefined belief in immortality. That truth was so universally received that the Old Testament takes it for granted. The existence of God and the immortality of the soul lie at the basis of Old Testament teaching. The after-life of the body was accepted also in a manner more or less clear. Immortality was not brought to light, but there

it was, and they who reject that doctrine go back into a darkness denser than that in which the heathens themselves dwelt. Why did the Egyptian king embalm his father, and lay him in spices, but that he thought that somehow or other there was another life, and he would, therefore, take care of the body? They would not have wasted precious linen, and gums, and spices, if they had thought that the body was mere rottenness for worms to consume for ever. Mary had deeper and clearer thoughts than that, for she expected that something would happen to that blessed body after Christ had died; and she must, therefore, anoint it, and bring the most precious spices that she could procure for his burial. At any rate, let your service of the Lord Jesus be the service of a risen Christ. Come not hither to worship one who died years ago—a hero of the past; but come to adore the ever-living Jesus.

"He lives, your great Redeemer lives."

He will certainly come in his own person to reward his saints; and ere he comes he sees what you are doing. "We live," said one, "in the great Taskmaster's eye." I care not for that title. I have no Taskmaster. It is far more an impulse to my life that I live within the sight of him whom, having not seen, I love, because he loved me and gave himself for me. If this does not quicken you, what will? If this does not nerve you to tireless diligence in holy service, what can? Our Lord Jesus Christ lives. Let us find some way of anointing his dear and reverend head—some way of crowning him who wore the crown of thorns for our sake. Ours it is to know that he lives, and that we live in him. On him would we expend the full force of our being, counting it all joy to spend and to be spent for his sake.

I am not going to stir you up, my fellow Christians, to do anything for Christ, for I fear to spoil the freeness of your love's life. I do not want to be pleading with you to enter into his service more fully; for the work of pressed men is never so much prized as that of happy volunteers. Yet as I love you I would have you love your Lord more and more. It is so sweet to belong to Christ, that the more fully we can belong to him the more free we are. I like that of Paul, where he calls himself the *doulos* of Christ, the slave of Jesus. He says exultingly, "Let no man trouble me. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus," as if he gloried to think of himself as the branded slave of his Lord. He had been beaten and scourged, and he retained upon his back the marks of his lashings, and therefore he was wont to say to himself, and smile all the while, "these are my Master's marks. I am branded with his name." Oh, sweet service, in which if it could be slavery it would be joy! I would not have a hair of my head that was not my Lord's if I could help it, nor a drop of my blood that did not flow for him if I could help it. My liberty—and I speak for you all—my liberty, if I might choose it, would be liberty never to sin again; freedom to do Christ's bidding, and that alone. I would fain lose my free will in his sweet will, and find it again as I never found it before in having yielded it up completely to his command.

I will not, therefore, so much intrude upon the sanctity of your heart's love as to suggest what you can do for Jesus. As the best juice flows from the cluster with the least pressure, so shall the best service

be that which is most spontaneous. Do not let me push you on, or draw you on, or drag you on; but be eager on your own account. Say to the Lord himself, "Draw me: I will run after thee." Have you not a certain private reason why you should love your Lord better than any other of his redeemed? I repeat it, I will not pry into your sacred secrets, but leave you to commune with your own heart, and with your Lord. Only let us so love him that when we look at him he shall say, "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck." Then shall we know what to do for our Well-beloved, and, what is better, we shall do it without further exhortation.

There I leave it. May the Holy Ghost bless the word!

As for you that do not love the Lord Jesus, God be merciful to you! I will not pronounce upon you an Anathema Maranatha, but I tremble lest it fall upon you. I am sore grieved for your sakes. I am, moreover, sore vexed for Christ's sake that he should be deprived of your love and service. What has he done that you should slight him? Oh, blind eyes, that cannot see his beauties, and deaf ears, that cannot hear the charms of his voice! God be merciful to you, and help you to trust your Saviour, and then you will love him for his salvation! It is no wonder that the saved ones love their Lord: it is a marvel that they do not love him ten thousand times more. The Lord be with you for Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark xiv., John xii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—797, 788.

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON.

DEAR FRIENDS,—When this letter reaches you I hope I shall have returned to my family, and my people, much refreshed. I can hardly hope to be very long quite free from the disease which afflicts me; yet I do confidently expect a few months of steady service, and I am anxious that upon these the divine blessing may richly descend. I beseech you pray for me.

For more than thirty years these sermons have been published week by week; may I not entreat your supplications that I may be enabled to maintain their freshness, fulness, and power? For this I shall need great help from on high. My own resources are slender enough, but the divine fountain can never run dry.

The church over which I preside is large beyond all precedent, containing more than five thousand members. I entreat your prayers that wisdom and grace may be given me as the Pastor of such a flock. I tremble as I think of my responsibility. Who is sufficient for these things?

Beside all this,—there are the Orphanage with its hundreds of little ones, the College with its students for the ministry, the Colportage with its book-selling missionaries, the Evangelists travelling from place to place and proclaiming the living word, and many other minor enterprises. The burden is too great for me unless the Lord's own power be revealed in my weakness. For these institutions I need money in large measure, and grace beyond all measure. Those who profit by these sermons would act kindly if they would help me with their prayers and their contributions. I need both, and both at this time, in a special manner.

On my return I shall have to prepare for the gathering of the clan, in the form of the College Conference. A great host of ministers will come together to spend a week in holy fellowship and united devotion. If the Lord be with us, it will be a soul-refreshing season, and the brethren will return to their flocks prepared for a great blessing: but without the Spirit of the Lord all will be in vain. By the love of Jesus I implore the special prayers of faithful brethren and sisters. O Lord, send now prosperity! Revive thy work! Revive our own souls, for Jesus' sake!

Your servant for Christ's sake,

Mentone, April 5, 1885. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE MAN CHRIST JESUS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 12TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Now consider how great this man *was*."—Hebrews vii. 4.

CONSIDER how great Melchizedek was. There is something majestic about every movement of that dimly-revealed figure. His one and only appearance is thus fitly described in the Book of Genesis,—"And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all." We see but little of him, yet we see nothing little in him. He is here and gone, as far as the historic page is concerned, yet is he "a priest for ever," and "it is witnessed that he liveth." Everything about him is on a scale majestic and sublime.

"Consider how great this man was" in the combination of his offices. He was duly appointed both priest and king: king of righteousness and peace, and at the same time priest of the Most High God. It may be said of him that he sat as a priest upon his throne. He exercised the double office to the great blessedness of those who were with him; for his one act towards Abraham would seem to be typical of his whole life; he blessed him in the name of the Most High God. "Consider how great this man was," that he not only ruled his people with righteousness and brought them peace, but he was their representative towards God and God's representative to them; and in each character distributed divine blessings.

"Consider how great this man was" in the power of his benedictions. Abraham had already been greatly blessed, so much so that he is described as "he that received the promises." Yet a receiver of promises so great, a man with whom God had entered into solemn covenant, was yet blessed by Melchizedek, "and without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better." This great man yet further blessed the blessed Abraham, and the father of the faithful was glad to receive benediction at his hands. No small man this: no priest of second

rank; but one who overtops the sons of men by more than head and shoulders, and acts a superior's part among the greatest of them.

"Consider how great this man was" in his supremacy over all around him. He met Abraham when he was returning as a conqueror from the overthrow of the robber kings; and the victorious patriarch bowed before him and gave him tithes of the best of the spoil. Without a moment's hesitation the man of God recognized the priest of God, and paid to him the tribute of a subject to the officer of a great king. In Abraham's bowing all the line of Aaronic priesthood did homage unto Melchizedek; for as the apostle saith, "Levi also, who receiveth tithes, paid tithes in Abraham, for he was yet in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him." So that all kings in Abraham, and all priests in Abraham, did homage unto this man, who, as king and priest, was owned to be supreme. "Consider how great this man was." When Paul had once proved that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham, he felt that he had clearly proved him to be greater than all others, at least to the Hebrews; for the seed of Abraham can recognize none greater than Abraham; and since Abraham by paying tithes acknowledges his subordination to Melchizedek, it is clear that the priest of the Most High God was the greatest of men.

"Consider how great this man was" as to the singularity of his person, "without father, without mother, without descent": that is to say, we know nothing as to his birth, his origin, or his history. Even this explanation hardly answers to the words, especially when it is added, "Having neither beginning of days, nor end of life." So mysterious is Melchizedek that many deeply-taught expositors think that he was veritably an appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are inclined to believe that he was not a king of some city in Canaan, as the most of us suppose, but that he was a manifestation of the Son of God, such as were the angels that appeared to Abraham on the plains of Mamre, and that divine being who appeared to Joshua by Jericho, and to the three holy ones in the furnace. At any rate, you may well "consider how great this man was" when you observe how veiled in cloud is everything about his coming and going—veiled because intended to impress us with the depth of the sacred meanings which were shadowed forth in him. How much more shall this be said of him of whom we ask—

> "Thy generation who can tell,
> Or count the number of thy years?"

"Consider how great this man was" in the speciality of his office. He had no predecessor in his priesthood, and he had no successor. He was not one who took a holy office and then laid it down; but as far as the historic page of Scripture is concerned we have no note of his quitting this mortal scene; he disappears, but we read nothing of his death any more than of his birth. His office was perpetual, and passed not from sire to son; for he was the type of One "who is made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life."

"Consider how great this man was" in his being altogether unique. There is another "after the order of Melchizedek," the glorious Antitype in whom Melchizedek himself is absorbed; but apart from him Mel-

chizedek is unique. Who can equal this strange, mysterious priest, prophet, king, sent of the Most High God to bless the father of the faithful? He is altogether alone: he receives no commission from the hands of men, nor from God by men; and he does not transmit to a successor what he had not received from a predecessor. Melchizedek stands alone: one mighty crag, rising out of the plain; a lone Alp, whose brow is swathed in cloud sublime. "Consider how great this man was;" but think not to measure that greatness.

I shall leave you to that consideration; for my business this morning is not with Melchizedek, but with a greater than he. I shall take my text in its connection, but lift it up to a higher application. Beloved friends, if Melchizedek was so great, how much greater is that man whom Melchizedek represents! If the type is so wonderful what must the Antitype be! I invite you to consider "how great" is he of whom it is written, "The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." I will not say "Consider how great this man *was*," for there is no verb: the "was" is inserted in italics by the translators. We are to consider "how great this man." Say "was" if you will, but read also "*is*," and "*shall be*." Consider how great this man was and is, and is to be, even the Man Christ Jesus.

And first, this morning, let me *exhort you to consider* how great this man is: then let me *assist you to consider* how great this man is: and then *let us practically improve our consideration* of how great this man is, trying to turn it to holy account as the Holy Ghost may enable us.

I. First, then, LET ME EXHORT YOU TO CONSIDER HOW GREAT THIS MAN, THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, IS.

This subject *claims* your consideration. I do not think it should be a matter of option with you whether you will now consider the greatness of your Lord or not; it is his due and right that you should consider his greatness. For he of whom we speak,—"this man," is one well known among us. If you be true to your profession he is one most dear to you, to whom you owe all things, aye, owe your very selves. He is one between whom and you there is a troth plighted: you are espoused unto him, your hearts are his, even as his heart is yours. If *you* do not consider him, who will? He has loved you, and given himself for you. Strangers may listen to our teaching at this time, and in vain we may cry,

> "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?
> Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?"

But you are no stranger, you are not even a guest in his house, but you are a child living at home with him. He is your brother, and much more; for he is bone of your bone, and flesh of your flesh. All your interests are wrapped up in him. You are one with him: by an endless union, one. I claim, therefore, and I am sure you assent at once to the claim, that you should often consider your Lord, and the greatness of his nature, person, office, and work. His greatness should be your perpetual theme. I would urge that all other thoughts should now be banished, for this is your Lord's own day, and therefore to him it should be dedicated with glad consent. If you are "in the Spirit on the Lord's day," you will, like John in Patmos, give all your thoughts to the Son

of Man who walketh among the golden candlesticks. I urge it on you that you do now consider with your whole heart and mind, "how great this man is." Do you not consent to the claim?

Certainly the subject *needs* consideration; for, dear friends, we shall never gain an idea of how great he is unless we do consider, and consider much. Here is a great deep, and it cannot be fathomed by the thoughtless. You think you know Christ, and, blessed be his name, you do know him in a sense; but do you know the thousandth part of him? When the apostle Paul had known Christ for many years he wrote to the Philippians, and he then expressed himself as desiring to know Christ; for though he knew him to his own personal salvation, yet he felt that he did not know him to the full. He owned that he knew the love of Christ, but he added, "it passeth knowledge." Well may each of us who has been for years a student at the Master's feet exclaim, "I find myself a learner yet." I suppose the saints who have been in heaven now for thousands of years, and have been evermore adoring him, are still students of him. This is the philosophy which the most cultured mind shall never fully compass,—"God manifest in the flesh." "Consider how great this man is!" This is a matter worthy of continual research, and calling for profound thought. You must weigh this subject, and turn it over, and meditate upon it the live-long day. You must let it lie both day and night upon your hearts as a bundle of camphire, perfuming the bosom in which it lies. You must look, and look, and look, and look again: still looking unto Jesus. The angels standing on the golden mercy-seat have ever their eyes bent downward, desiring to look within; and that must be your posture. Oh, you servants of the Lord, by looking to Jesus you began to live, by looking to him you shall continue to live, and your life shall find strength and growth. This sacred subject shall ever need more and more consideration from you. Oh the depths of the love, and wisdom, and glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ!

I go a little further, and say that not only does my subject claim your consideration and need your consideration, but it solemnly *commands* it. The text is not a mere piece of advice; it is by inspiration that the apostle bids you to-day out of this sacred page, "Consider how great this man was." He charges you to think of Melchizedek, but much more would he have you remember Melchizedek's Antitype. Oh, do not, my brethren, do not need to be pressed to this divine study: love it, never cease from it. Count every minute wasted in which you are not learning more about Jesus. Reckon all other knowledge to be as mere draff and dogs' meat as compared with the knowledge of Christ crucified. In these days of science, falsely so called, determine with the apostle to know nothing among men save Jesus Christ and him crucified. It is imperative upon you that you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and all your mind; and that God in Christ Jesus should call into exercise every faculty of your inner man, while, with blended intellect and emotion, you consider how great he was.

Follow out this meditation, I pray you, because there is an exceeding great *reward* for any man who will "consider how great this man was." I find for myself that the only possibility of my living is living in Christ and unto Christ. Look you about and try to live by the wisdom of

man. Unstable as water and fickle as the wind is the product of human wisdom. The history of philosophy, from the beginning until now, is the history of fools; and never was folly so self-evident as in the philosophy which is now dominant. I believe that within a century it will be found impossible to make men believe that educated men were ever so degraded as to accept the philosophy of the present hour; it will seem to be so altogether absurd and contrary to all reason and common sense, that it will be rejected with scorn as a popular delusion of a dark age. Even to-day this generation is kicking about like footballs the philosophies of preceding ages, and we may rest assured that future generations will do the same with the dotings of to-day. I find, therefore, that I must come back to the revelation of God. Here is a rock beneath my feet—"God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." Certain great facts concerning God and his Christ have been made known to us by the Holy Ghost, and these are infallibly sure. God's revelation is true, whatever man's dreams may be. On the basis of revelation there is foothold. A personal knowledge of Christ revealed by the Spirit is also a sure matter. I get to Jesus, I speak to him, and meditate upon him, and he rises before me greater than ever, till in his presence all the learning of men condenses into folly. He is "God only wise." Ah, then I live when he is all in all! My heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth when I forget all else save Christ Jesus my Lord. Therefore, brethren, I say that you shall find a great reward in full often coming near to your Lord, and considering again and again how great he is.

Consider his greatness, and I again remind you that the blessing comes only by consideration. I may speak to you this morning about the greatness of my Master, but I shall not succeed in fully declaring it. I am never more vexed with myself than when I have done my very best to extol his dear name! What is it but holding a candle to the sun? What are my lispings compared with the loud acclamations which such an one as he is might well expect from those who love him? You must carefully consider, or you will miss the blessing. It will not be enough for you to hear, or read; you must do your own thinking, and consider your Lord for yourselves. You may even read the Bible itself without profit, if you do not *consider* as well as read. The wine is not made by gathering the clusters, but by treading the grapes in the wine-vat: under pressure the red juice leaps forth. Not the truth as you read it, but the truth as you meditate upon it, will be a blessing to you. "Read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." "Consider how great this man was." Shut yourselves up with Jesus, if you would know him. "Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast." In Christ there is shelter, and the more you consider him the greater your peace will be. Come and lay your finger into the prints of the nails, and thrust your hand into his side. Commune with the personal Christ, who ever liveth; and evermore "consider how great this man was."

Thus have I exhorted you to this duty; now let me try to help you in it. But what help will mine be unless the Divine Spirit be with me, that the word spoken may be with power?

II. LET ME NEXT ASSIST YOU TO CONSIDER HOW GREAT THIS MAN WAS.

And first, lest the very use of the expression, "this man," should leave anybody for a moment in doubt as to our faith in his Godhead, I bid you consider how great this man was *in his relationship to God.* For though he was man, he was not merely man. He was assuredly and truly man in all respects, "man of the substance of his mother," bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; and yet he was indeed and of a truth very God. Do not think of him as a divine man, or as a human God; he was neither the one nor the other. He was perfectly man, yet he was infinitely God. Think, then, into what a position of honour and dignity his manhood was uplifted by union with the Godhead in one person. Born, growing, gathering strength, coming to manhood, suffering, dying, in all this he was man; yet he was never at any time less divine. Our Lord's humanity is not to be thought of apart from his deity, for he is one and indivisible. I have sometimes heard objections made against certain expressions in Dr. Watts's hymns in which our Lord is spoken of as the God that bled and died, and so forth. I fear that the objection is frequently aimed less at the poet than at the truth of the deity of our Lord: the objector figures as a critic because he dares not avow himself a heretic. Take note that in the Scriptures you shall find frequent confusions of speech upon the person of our Lord, intentionally made, in order to show that although the natures were distinct, yet they were indissolubly united in the one person of Jesus. Of his one person might popularly be predicated that which in strict accuracy could only be true of his humanity, or only of his deity. To the one person of our Lord will be found to be ascribed what he did both as God and as man, and it is not needful for us to be wise or accurate above what is written by the Spirit of God. It is possible to be so true to the letter as to be false to the spirit. Cavillers have no monopoly of wisdom. My Lord Jesus is to me no less a man because he is God. Oh, how my heart loves him! He is to me fairest of the sons of men, chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. But he is to me because of his manhood none the less, but all the more, "God over all, blessed for ever." Into the dust my spirit bows before his majesty, and my soul adores him. I ask you, therefore, to consider the greatness of his manhood because it never was apart from his Godhead, and cannot be thought of except in connection therewith. "The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Inconceivable is the greatness of the man who is thus one with God.

You, my brethren, are not in doubt upon this vital matter; let me, therefore, ask you to consider "how great this man was" as to *his relationship to men.* Christ Jesus is the second man, the Lord from heaven. Adam, our first father, was the head of the race, and all men were in him as their representative: in him they stood in the garden; in him, alas, they fell when he broke the divine command, and the Lord took up the quarrel of his covenant, and cast him out of Paradise. "Oh, what a fall was there, my brethren: then you and I and all of us fell down." We inherit because of Adam's failure a nature whose tendencies

are towards evil. Adam was a very great personage in relation to the race: he was the summary of all the generations, the fountain of the stream of humanity. To him we might apply the language of the prophet, "Thou hast been in Eden, the garden of God. . . . . Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee." As Adam came forth from God he was as a covering cherub, under whose wings the race nestled down. But now comes in the Lord Jesus Christ as the greater man, the representative man, in whom none are made to fall, but multitudes arise. In this man the Lord is again well pleased with men. Time was when God looked on rebellious man, and it repented him that he had made him; but now that he turns his eye to this perfect man he feels no such repentance; but, on the contrary, we read that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." For the sake of the man Christ Jesus he deals with the innumerable race of sinners in a way of long-suffering and pity, and does not destroy them. Long ago had the flood-gates been pulled up again, and man been swept away by a deluge, not of water but of fire, if it had not been that the long-suffering Lord looks on the Well-Beloved Christ, and therefore spares mankind. Yea, more; for his sake he sends the gospel of peace to men, and in the name of Jesus glad tidings are sent to every creature. It has sometimes happened that the illustrious deed of one man has served to elevate a class, or even a nation into honour. A grand, heroic deed has welded you not only to that one person but to all his kith and kin. Consider, then, how great this man was, that the divine mind which cannot look upon sin without indignation, nevertheless was so charmed to look upon the person and character of this glorious Man, that an amnesty was proclaimed to the race, and a message was sent to the sons of men bidding them repent and turn to him and live. "Consider," then, "how great this man was."

Come a little closer, and reach forward to that which will delight your hearts far more; consider *the relationship of Christ to his own people.* Now we get on sure ground, and feel a rock beneath our feet. Long before the heavens and the earth were made, God with prescient eye beheld the person of his Son as God in human nature, and he saw all his elect lying in him. The church is his body, "the fulness of him that filleth all in all." God the Father saw in the divine decree the mystical Christ, and he was well pleased with all his redeemed for Christ Jesus' sake. How wondrous was that transaction when in the council-chamber of eternity the covenant was made, and the Lord Jesus Christ became the surety of that covenant. He entered into covenant with the eternal God on the behalf of his chosen that he would make atonement for their sin, and would perfect the righteousness which should cover everyone of them, and make them to be accepted in the Beloved. No actual sacrifice was offered for thousands of years; but see "how great this man was," since on the strength of his bare promise the Lord continued to save men for thousands of years, admitting them to his infinite glory before the Mediator had appeared, or the Redeemer had put a hand to the work. Consider that you and I, and all of us who are in Christ, are this day beloved for his sake, accepted for his sake, justified for his sake. Still doth God embrace us in the arms of almighty love for his sake; for his sake heaven is being prepared for us; for his sake the

treasures of the infinite are given to us; because we are the covenanted ones for whom he pledged his troth, and for whom in the fulness of time he poured out his heart's blood, that he might redeem us unto God. "Consider how great this man was." He is so great that all the saints are blessed in him. He is so great that we, as many as have believed, dwell evermore in the clefts of this great Rock, and find in him our castle and high tower. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." "Consider how great this man was."

Let me help you a little further, dear friends, to "consider how great this man was," by reminding you of *the surroundings of his first advent.* Thousands of years before his birth holy men had been speaking of him. Prophets and seers all pointed to him as The Coming One. "How great this man was," since the wisest and best of mankind all looked forward to his day with gladness. Think of that wonderful system of types, and emblems, and symbols which God ordained by his servant Moses; for the whole of this system was meant to set forth the Messiah, who would yet appear in the fulness of time. To him witnessed each bleeding sacrifice, each censer of sweet incense, each golden vessel, each curtain and wall of tabernacle or temple: all spoke concerning him. Ay, and more than that, all the histories of all the empires were all but concentric rings of which he was the centre; for the Lord Jesus is the centre of history, the sum total of all God's doings and manifestations among the sons of men. That was an august Person towards whom all the past had been labouring, and for whom all the present was agonizing. "How great this man was," that when he came the saints were watching for him: Simeon and Anna could not depart till he appeared. Angels stood on tip-toe ready to descend and sing, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Humble shepherds, as they watched their flocks, did but wait for the signal to hasten to adore him; and wise men from the east forgot the fatigues of a long journey that they might lay their gold and incense at his feet. "How great this man was," when, being born and laid in a manger, the whole earth was moved by his appearing.

Consider, too, "how great this man was," not only as to the outward circumstances of his coming, but *as to the secret mystery of his birth.* For this man was not "born in sin," as we are; neither was he "shapen in iniquity." This is a thing to be thought of and considered in our privacy, but it cannot be omitted here. Thus said the angel to the blessed Virgin, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." "Conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary," he was truly a man, but not fallen man. The method by which the pure human nature of the man Christ Jesus was produced is a great mystery, but it serves to make us see "how great this man was." I will say no more than this, that we have here the fulfilment of the promise, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Think of that word of old: "When he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Let us,

therefore worship. Reverently forbearing all idle intrusion into the deep things of God, let us go to Bethlehem, and "consider how great this man was."

Now, let us look at *his life*. After he emerged from the obscurity of his childhood, what a life was that of our Lord! His greatest adversaries, unless they have been mad, have never dared to speak against his character. If the Christian religion were supposed to be an invention, the existence of the narrative of the life of Jesus would be more wonderful than the facts themselves. The conception of a perfect character requires a perfect mind, and a perfect mind would never have prepared a fiction and imposed it upon men as a veritable history. If the life of Jesus be a fable, then a perfect being has deceived us; and this it is not possible for us to imagine. The life of Jesus Christ is great throughout. It is so tender and so gentle that it is never little and mean: it is so unselfish that it never ceases to be majestic; it is so condescending that it is pre-eminently sublime. Above all, it is full of truth, transparent, artless, natural. No one ever thought of Jesus as acting a part yet; he is reality itself. He is so simple, so unaffected, so truly "the holy child Jesus," that in this he is great above all. Never was a man so wholly seen as the Christ; and yet never was man so little understood. You have read memoirs of departed worthies, and you have felt, "The biographer did well to say no more upon this point;" but you never felt that anything need be reserved as to the character of Jesus. If his chroniclers had kept on writing till the world itself had been made a library of the lives of Christ they would never have recorded an unworthy act or a regrettable word. It is not only that his pursuits were majestic, for he came to save men; that his motives were divine, for he revealed the Father; but it is *himself* that is so great—I mean his soul, his spirit, the man himself. Look at Alexander, he is a great conqueror, but what a pitiful creature he appears when the drunkard's bowl has maddened him. What a poor thing is Napoleon as seen in privacy! In his captivity he was as petulant as a spoiled child. Consider the Lord Jesus, and it does not matter where you view him: in the wilderness he is grandly victorious over temptation, in the crowd he is greatly wise in answering those who would entrap him. Behold him in his agony in the Garden; was there ever such an Agoniser? Behold him as the crucified; did ever cross hold such a sufferer? When Jesus is least he is greatest, and when he is in the direst darkness his brightness is best revealed. In death he destroys death; in the grave he bursts the sepulchre. "Consider how great this man was": the field of his life is ample; do not be slow to investigate it.

Beloved, I cannot speak as I would of him. The blaze of this Sun blinds me! Yet consider how great this man was *in his death;* for then he appeared as the great Sin-offering, putting away the sin of his people. The Lord had made to meet in him the iniquity of us all. What a weight was on him, yet he sustained it! The wrath of God on account of sin fell upon him who had never sinned, and he bore it all. A penalty which must have made a hell for us for ever was exacted of our Lord upon the cross, and he discharged it. He drank the whole of our bitter cup. He bore in himself all that was necessary to vindicate

the divine justice until he could truly say, "It is finished." "Lama Sabachthani" is the most terrible word that ever came from human lips; and therefore "It is finished" is the greatest utterance that tongue ever gave forth. The work was colossal; what if I say it was infinite; and therefore our Lord Jesus when he cried "It is finished," had reached the summit of greatness. "Consider how great this man was."

Now, beloved, consider for a minute "how great this man was" when *he rose again;* for he could not be holden with the bonds of death, and his body could not see corruption. It was a great thing in itself for Christ to rise, but what I want you to remember is, that we all rose in him. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"; and especially his covenanted people were raised up together with him. There was for his redeemed a death in his death and a rising again in his rising again; for we have been made partakers of his resurrection, and we live in newness of life by his rising from the dead. This is his cry as he rises from the tomb, "Because I live ye shall live also." "Consider how great this man was" whose life imparts life to all who are in him.

But *he has gone up on high,* and has led captivity captive. Think of the gifts which were showered down from heaven in consequence of this man's ascent into the highest. For the Holy Spirit descended never to return till the close of this dispensation, and now all the gifts that rest in the church of God, and all the works of regeneration, illumination, sanctification, and the like, which are wrought by the blessed Paraclete, are the effects of the entrance of this man into the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High. Every soul regenerated, every heart comforted, every mind quickened, every eye illuminated, every creature spiritually blessed, reflects glory upon this man. How great is he!

Beloved, I would we had time this morning to introduce you to this man as he now sits *at the right hand of God,* even the Father. There is no need for me to depict him; if there were it were impossible to me. What said the man who loved him best, and knew him best? "When I saw him I fell at his feet as dead." "Consider how great this man is" now, when every angel pays him homage, and at the name of Jesus every knee doth bow, of things in heaven; as by-and-by every knee shall bow of things on earth, and things that are under the earth, for Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. "Consider how great this man is," and then remember that he shall shortly come to be our Judge! Possibly, while I am yet speaking to you, he may appear; no man knoweth the day nor the hour; but "how great this man is" will be clearly seen when, in flaming fire, he shall take vengeance upon those that will not obey him. How "great" will he be when in the manifestation of his glory all believers shall be glorified. I think I hear, even now, sounding out of my theme, shouts of "hallelujah, hallelujah," from assembled worlds. Yes, the music peals forth loud and long, "King of kings, and Lord of lords. HALLELUJAH. For he shall reign for ever and ever. HALLELUJAH!" Break forth with your loud hosannas, oh, ye waiting spirits of believing men, for the time is at hand when he shall be admired in all them that believe! Consider how great this man is. I have but reached the fringe of my

subject. We see but the skirts of our Lord's garments; his actual glory is unspeakable, unsearchable. Oh, the depths! Oh, the depths!

III. This in a few words is THE PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT of the whole subject, with which we must wind up. Consider how great this man was, and as you consider, believe in his infinite power to bless men. He is full of blessing as the sun is full of light, that he may shine upon his needy creatures. Christ is full of blessing that he may bless poor, needy, empty sinners. Dost thou say, poor sinner, "I am so great a sinner that he cannot save me"? Consider what this man did when he was here on earth; he went about and laid his hands on the diseased, and they were cured; he looked at devils, and they fled; he spoke to fevers and they disappeared. And he in heaven is, and if I may so say, greater than when he was here below, for here on earth he was veiled in humiliation, but now he is enthroned in infinite majesty, "able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Believe in the infinite blessedness treasured up in Christ for every believing soul, and come and take your share of it this morning. All that you want, and all that you wish—come and receive freely, for he doth graciously dispense it, and it is a part of his glory that he delights to enrich the children of men. Let faith in Jesus be one lesson—may God write it on each heart.

And then let us ascribe to our Lord Jesus Christ all the honour that our thoughts can compass. Let us give to him this day our very selves over again. Consider how great this man was, and go away feeling how greatly you are indebted to him, what great things you ought to do for him, and how little your greatest thing is when you have done it as compared with the greatness of his deservings.

> "Let him be crowned with majesty
> That bowed his head to death;
> And be his honour sounded high
> By all things that have breath."

Do not you feel that question pressing upon your heart?

> "Oh what shall I do
> My Saviour to praise!"

Do something; and having done it do more, and yet more. Give up your whole being to the showing forth of how great this Man is!

Once more, considering how great this Man is, do not be afraid, nor troubled, nor tumbled up and down in your thoughts about anything that is happening, or is yet to happen. "Consider how great this man was." Our wise men are going to do away with the old faith; modern culture means to stamp out old-fashioned orthodoxy. Christianity itself is getting to be effete, and something better is to supersede it. Listen! "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. He that sitteth in the heaven shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." One said to me the other day, "The current of thought does not seem to

run in the direction of evangelical religion." Well, I said I should not believe in evangelical religion an atom the more if the current of thought did run that way. We do not believe according to the counting of heads. The currents of men's thoughts are so uncertain that you can better tell the flight of birds, or the changing of English weather. The gospel is perhaps the surer to be true because there are so few who believe it. It is according to our expectation that God's revealed truth should be abhorred and hated by the wise men of every generation. I shall not believe the gospel any the less if I am left alone, nor shall I believe it any the more if the whole world shall cry it up. Let God be true and every man a liar. He whose faith stands upon the concensus of popular opinion has placed his feet upon the sand, but he who has read his Bible and has been taught of the Spirit of God what truth is, will hold to it come what may. When you consider how great this man is, it seems to me that to be a fool for his sake is the highest wisdom, and that to cling to what he says is the best philosophy, and to believe him, and none beside is not alone a duty but a necessity of every Christian spirit. Be of good cheer, dear friends! Let no man's heart fail him because of modern doubt. Let no man be troubled because of the fierceness of the fight. I can hear already the sounding of the trumpets of the Lord's coming. He is not far away; even if thousands of years intervene before his feet shall touch the Mount of Olivet the victory will never be doubtful. All is done that is required for winning the battle, his blood has been shed, his life has been accepted as a ransom. The eternal decree has settled it, nothing can change it! "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm ii. 110; Hebrews vii. 1—10, 17, 21, 22.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—72, 392, 60.

A pamphlet is being widely advertised as prefaced by "Mr. Spurgeon." I have written no such preface. My views on all subjects are as they were. It is disgraceful that an attempt should be made to propagate doctrines which I loathe, by leading the public to suppose that I have espoused them.

April 15, 1885. C. H. SPURGEON.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FIRST HEALING AND THEN SERVICE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 19th, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her: and she arose, and ministered unto them."—Matthew viii. 14, 15.

THIS event took place at Capernaum, but Peter's residence was at Bethsaida; for we read, "Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter." How came Peter to have a house at Capernaum? Poor fishermen do not often have two houses. May not the conjecture be highly probable that, finding the Lord Jesus Christ was frequently at Capernaum, Peter thought it best to have a dwelling there, that he might always be present when the Master was preaching, and that he might do his best to entertain him between whiles? I like to think that the servant changed his place of abode for his Master's sake. Would it not be well if many Christian people had some little consideration when they are choosing a house, as to whether it will be convenient for the hearing of the word? Do you not think that a great many professors look chiefly for every other kind of advantage, and, when they have virtually made their choice, they afterwards enquire into the very secondary item of their nearness to a place where they may worship God, enjoy Christian fellowship, and be useful? There are some in this congregation who have moved to this part of town to become members of an earnest, prayerful church. Such believers feel that the first consideration in life must be the health of their souls, the benefiting of their children, and their usefulness in promoting the cause of Christ. When they have made the selection of a house in that way and for that reason, they have found a blessing resting upon them, according to the promise, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Some who have forgotten this rule, and, like Lot, chosen the well-watered plains of Sodom, have lived to rue their choice. Although the house may be commodious, and the position convenient, these advantages will not make up for losing the means of grace and missing opportunities of holy service. When Mephibosheth lived at Lo-debar, the place of no pasture, David fetched him up to Jerusalem, where he himself delighted to dwell. It would be well for

many a limping brother if he made a like change. Thus, before we actually cross the threshold of Peter's house we learn a lesson.

Our Lord Jesus Christ had been having a heavy day: he had been to the synagogue, and he had preached and had wrought miracles; he had moved in the midst of a great throng, and now the Sabbath was drawing to a close he needed refreshment, and it was most convenient that Peter had a house into which the Lord could go. I do not suppose it was a stately mansion, probably it was little better than a hut; for Peter was only a fisherman: but the Lord Jesus made it honourable enough by entering it. Where the king is there the palace is.

Though our Lord went to Peter's house to rest, he did not find it free from trouble. It was a hospital before he made it a palace. Peter's wife's mother was on her bed prostrate with "a great fever." Typhus of the worst kind was burning out her life. However good a man may be, he will not escape trial in the flesh. You may have a house full of sanctity and full of sickness at the same time. We find it true while we are here, that "the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness." The regenerated spirit has risen into life, but the body lingers under the power of death, and its attendant pain and weakness. Certain persons attribute all sickness to the devil, and impute special sin to those who are grievously afflicted. This teaching is as false as it is cruel. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." I can bear witness that some of the saintliest persons I have ever known have been bedridden for years together; and others in whom the very image of Christ was conspicuous, from whose lips all the country round gathered up the choicest sentences of holy experience, have been invalids for twenty or thirty years at a stretch. Our sicknesses are of the Lord's appointing however painful they may be, and we may without doubt say, as David did, "The Lord hath chastened me sore." "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick," is still a truth. Even Peter's house, though it be the abode of a chosen saint, and a leading apostle, whose very shadow would one day heal the sick, had a terrible fever in it which threatened death. Yet Jesus came where the fever polluted the air. If the disease had come, the great Physician had come also. We are not alarmed at the Cross if Christ comes with it.

Notice, with regard to our Lord's entering the house of Peter, that he came there with his three most favoured disciples. If you read the statement given by Mark in his first chapter you may be somewhat surprised to discover Peter, James, and John there. We read,—"When they were come out of the synagogue, they entered into the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John." Whether Andrew was there or not I cannot tell: he was joint proprietor of the house, but he is not mentioned as being there. Whenever you see Peter, James, and John present together with the Lord, you may look for special wonders. These were the men who beheld the Lord's exceeding glory on the Mount: these were nearest to the agony of Gethsemane: these were admitted to behold the raising from the dead of the young maiden when the Lord put forth all the gathered company. To this most select triumvirate did Jesus display himself as he did not to the rest of the apostles, and much less to the world. Did not the Saviour thus give us notice that the healing of Peter's wife's mother was a choice manifesta-

tion of his power and grace, and was intended to convey a lesson to the choicer spirits among his followers? I think so, and therefore I shall so use the incident. To you who love Jesus much, and live in special nearness to him, there is a voice from the bed of her who rose from the fever to minister to her Lord. You also are called from your weakness that you may pay personal service to him who heals all your diseases.

Yet though Jesus and Peter and James and John were there, nothing is before you but a family group, a scene in a house. True religion displays its greatest marvels around the domestic hearth. A fisherman's mother-in-law becomes an historic personage through the Lord's touching her. What glory Jesus casts upon common things! With what grandeur he invests a room in a poor man's house! A fisherman's hut becomes the head-quarters of the Captain of our salvation. He heals a woman within its doors, and before long "all the city was gathed together at the door." O that we may see the like: our own dear ones saved, and then the whole city roused to seek divine healing!

We will arrange our discourse under the headings of four observations.

I. First, let us observe that IT MAY BE WE HAVE SOME IN OUR HOUSE WHO NEED THE MINISTRY OF THE LORD JESUS. One in Peter's house could not as yet minister to Christ, for she needed that Christ should minister to her. She was sick of a great fever, and quite prostrated by it, so as to be altogether unable to rise. Let us think whether we have not some about us who are spiritually sick, in a way which may be likened to a great fever.

What would the fever represent? Those who are in a fever represent spiritually those who are *on fire with sin*. The original word for "fever" bears a close relation to the word "fire." The world's great poet speaks of "the fiery fever." A burning heat inflames the body, quickens the pulse to an unnatural pace, parches the mouth and tongue, and dries up the entire system. Those who have a fever in their souls are hot after sin, dried up with ill desires, inflamed with evil lusts. What unhealthy energy many even show in the indulgence of their passions, or in the pursuit of their ambitions: they are so inflamed with their desires that their life is consumed. Have we not seen some whom we dearly loved afflicted with this fierce distemper? Touch upon certain points, and we discover that they are diseased in reference to them; they are in an inflamed state of mind; they cannot be made to think coolly or judge calmly, but they grow excited and angry. Their touch is that of a fevered hand; their whole nature is burning with the fire of sin. Such persons are not always alike inflamed; they are frequently gentle and tractable; so much so, that we are filled with hope concerning them. Often fever is intermittent; the patient is hot at one time, and cold at another; and in many sinners the fever of sin is intermittent in its symptoms. They are not always drinking; sometimes they are sober for a long period, and express themselves as deeply penitent for former falls. What pleasant company, what fine genial spirits they are at such times! The fever returns, and nothing can restrain them: they drink even to delirium. Alas, the misery which is thus caused! Others are gentle, and loving

for a season; and then they suddenly give way to anger, and there is no knowing what they will say or do. When once the fever is on them they become as inflamed as ever. We know persons from whom the heat of the fever is so long gone that we think surely they are healed; but, alas, their cool times are only a pause between the attacks, and the evil returns with increased energy. Their goodness is as the morning cloud, and as the early dew; it comes hopefully, but it disappears utterly. We have mistaken the period between the fever fits for the calm of a cure, but it has not turned out to be so; they have, perhaps, been even worse after their hopeful times than ever they were before; like him from whom the evil spirit went out of his own accord, only to return again, and bring with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself to enter in and dwell there. Have you not such cases under your own roofs, or among your next of kin—poor souls inflamed with the terrible heat of sin?

These fevered people are *frequently very restless.* It is one effect of the fever that the man cannot lie long together either on this side or on the other, but turns to and fro. Even his sleep is broken; neither by day nor by night can he find rest. He is dried up, and feels as weak as if he were brought into the dust of death and utterly dissolved. His experience is not so much pain as something worse than pain, an utter absence of rest. Have you not friends who in this sense are feverish? I had almost said I hope they are so, if they are, indeed, under the power of sin. There are signs of life where unrest abounds. We know young men with happy homes who cannot be content; they seem resolved to break their mothers' hearts, and their fathers know not what to do with them. Nothing pleases them, they are always unsettled. They have been put to half-a-dozen businesses already, and have left each one of them: they are now longing for a foreign country, or for enlistment in the army, or for anything other than their present calling. We have known them go to the colonies and come back again, finding nothing there; a sea voyage was to cure them, but, alas, a sinner on land is a sinner at sea. The malady is inward, and needs change of self rather than change of place. Under the influence of the fever of sin men wish, and do not know what they wish; they are like a rolling thing before the whirlwind, or as waves of the sea driven with the wind and tossed: no part of them seems to be at rest, a sort of madness possesses them. Above all, there is a restlessness about them in reference to sin: they sin, but they are not pleased; and after they have sinned they are eaten up by remorse, a remorse, however, which is not practically operative; for they go back to sin again; flying like the moth to the candle wherein they have already burned their wings. Such persons often become irritable towards their friends when checked in their wrong doing, and even become at last, like Pashur in the book of Jeremiah, a terror to themselves and to their friends.

I may be treading upon tender ground in all this. I believe my words are true to the letter. I shall ask Christian people who have not this heavy trouble to be very thankful, and to pray to God for those who have. With those dear friends who have to endure the sore affliction of having such in their family I desire to sympathize, and to encourage them to bring these feverish spirits to the Lord Jesus by prayer and faith, that in them the parable of the prodigal may be literally fulfilled.

One symptom of a fever is that a man *loses appetite for that which would be good for him.* Some of our unconverted friends have no taste for the gospel; we cannot easily induce them to come to hear it. If you could get them under the sound of the word, you would sit and pray, and even agonize for them, all the while the truth was being preached; but, alas! they will not come near; they have no taste, no liking, no care for heavenly things; the thing they most require is that for which they have the least desire. Yet, fear not; Jesus can give them appetite, and everything else which is necessary to a perfect cure.

On the other hand, a fevered patient often *feels a great thirst,* which he cannot by any means allay. He longs to drink and drink again, and with all his drinking the heat is not abated. Sometimes the sick man has *an appetite for what he must not taste,* he craves after the most injurious and even unnatural things; foods which would be most pernicious he prefers. So is it with unconverted ones when under the full power of sin; they are eager enough to hear a godless lecture, or to listen to opinions which are the opposite of truth; they would go through any hardship to indulge their passions, and sacrifice any amount to be allowed their desires. As the horse-leech crieth, "Give, give," so is sin insatiable. Sin can never yield satisfaction to the soul of man: as well might the thirsty hope to relieve their anguish by draughts of brine. As it is with cups of wine, so is it with sin; one makes room for another. He that has sinned will sin. It is an awful part of the punishment of sin that it grows into a habit and increases in intensity as it is indulged. I may rightly say of the black well of sin, "He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again and thirst more." Sin is a thing of rapid propagation, and never abides alone. You cannot retain one sin in the house by itself, for it will before long produce a numerous progeny, a generation of vipers, many as the hairs of your head. What a dreadful thing it is for a man to have a fever upon him which makes him thirst for that which increases his thirst.

But the worst point in the case of the sinner is this, that this fever of his *will prove fatal.* This son, daughter, husband, or wife of yours will perish through the fever of sin, if it be not cured. A great fever is a great danger, and so is sin. In our Lord's days men did not know how to deal with fever so well as now, therefore those who were taken with it were doomed. This poor woman would have died if Jesus had not interposed: thus is it with the sinful ones whose cases we deplore.

I have thus described the disease: what shall we do with it? Let us see what the disciples did.

Mark says, "Anon they *tell him of her.*" I would earnestly persuade you to do the same. Take the case of the person who is laid upon your heart and spread it before the Lord. Go over the matter in detail; not for his information, but to excite your own prayerfulness. Look the matter in the face, making no excuses for the sinner, and in all truthfulness tell the Lord what aileth the sinful one. Pour out your heart before the Lord, and sorrow over the lost one, even as Samuel mourned over Saul, only with better hope. Tell the case to Jesus just as you would mention a physical case to a doctor. He is ready to hear it all, and to consider it. Make a *confidant* of Jesus. Do not go and com-

plain all over the neighbourhood, "My boy does this," or "My husband does that," for you may increase the evil in that way by incensing the person against yourself and your religion. You may tell Jesus all about it, without restraint. No harm can come of such a relation. It will be a relief to your own mind, and it will be the most proper way of engaging your Lord to help you.

Luke tells us "they *besought him for her.*" After you have stated the case to your Lord, then plead with him, plead his promises, and plead his nature, plead the need of the case, and the glory which a cure will bring. Let it be no cold prayer, but a warm, hearty, intense entreaty. Do not wrangle with sinners about religion, but wrestle with Christ about them. Beseech the sinners for Christ, but never fail to beseech Christ for the sinners. When little can be done with men you can still do much with Jesus. It will be of very little use to be always worrying them with, "You should not do this," and, "You should not do that": but it will be of infinite service to go and say, "Lord, have mercy upon these poor souls who know thee not." Never give over praying for your prodigals as long as there is breath in their bodies; no, not even if they curse you for doing so.

We find also that when they had thus told Jesus of her, and had besought him, then they *brought him into the chamber;* so that we read in our text, "When Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever." They seemed to say, "Lord, this is all we can do. We would have thee look upon the dying woman and consider her. There she is." Can you not by faith so realize the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ that you see him viewing the lost estate of those for whom you are concerned? Your friend is fevered with sin, but Jesus sees it. Your boy is restless, but Jesus watches him. Your daughter is like to perish, but Christ looks upon her. Every day let your importunate prayers keep them under Christ's eye. Bring unto Jesus all your sinful ones; lay them at his feet; leave them in his presence. When you have done all this: when you have told him of her, and besought him about her, and brought him to the house to look upon her, then you may expect his healing touch and saving word.

That is our first remark.

II. Secondly: THE MINISTRY OF JESUS MUST PRECEDE THE MINISTRY OF THE SAVED ONES. We anxiously desire that these friends of ours who are now sick of the fever of sin should yet become the servants of Christ, and should minister to him. I can imagine the joy of that anxious mother over yonder if she should ever be privileged to hear her boy preach the gospel—that boy who has even been known to swear. What delight would fill the wife's bosom if she could hear her infidel husband engage publicly in prayer. Some of you are thinking now of certain gifted persons who are using all their abilities against the cause of Christ, and "Oh," say you, "if they might be converted, my heart would dance with delight." This is a right desire, but do not indulge it unwisely. Do not ask them to do anything for Jesus while they are unregenerate. Healing must come before serving. When a person is "laid, and sick of a fever," do not ask her to rise and wait upon the Lord Jesus Christ. No; *his* ministry to Peter's wife's mother preceded *her* ministry to him. She was "laid," that is, prostrated by the terrible

malady. As a body greatly weakened seems to cling to the bed, and almost sink into it, so was she: she was like a crushed thing, or a sheep cast upon its back in a trench, and so she was powerless to do anything. Thus is it with the sinner. What can he do for Christ? "When we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died for the ungodly." There is no strength in an ungodly man wherewith to serve God. He has no faith, and without faith it is impossible to please God: he has no love, and even if a deed were done rightly, yet if there was no love as the motive, it could not be acceptable with God. The sinner, in fact, has no spiritual life, and if he should try to do good works they would be dead works, and could not please the living God. Out of a foul spring no clean waters can come, and out of a corrupt heart no acceptable works can proceed. Christ must give us strength, and cause us both to will and to do of his own good pleasure, for without him we can do nothing.

Moreover, this sick woman was *utterly unfit* to do anything for Jesus and his disciples with a great fever upon her. Everywhere she went she would spread the contagion of her malady. Everything she touched would be infected: any food she prepared would be nauseous even to think upon. Let her keep her bed, by all means, and let none go near her unless they are compelled to do so; for fever soon seizes upon fresh victims. So you that are ungodly cannot serve Christ, for everything you do is defiled: you cannot lay your hand even upon holy things without polluting them. Your thoughts are feverish, your words are feverish, your acts are feverish: therefore we cannot invite your co-operation in the work of the Lord. You would do more hurt than good, if as sinful men you pretended to render service to a holy God. Such is your natural depravity that you would spread infection all around, even if you attempted to minister to the Lord Jesus.

What is more, a person sick of a fever, if in her feverishness she were to arise and wait upon guests would get no good, but *run terrible risks*. Persons in fever must not be exposed to draughts, or be driven to exert themselves. Every doctor would judge it to be most injurious to a person in a high state of fever to attempt to work. I solemnly believe that unconverted people get hurt when they attempt religious duties. To preach with an unrenewed heart must be to pronounce one's own death-warrant. If unrenewed men come to the sacramental table they eat and drink condemnation to themselves; and if they in any way make a profession of faith they are enacting a falsehood in the sight of high heaven, seeing they have no such faith. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" No, you must stand back, you that have never been washed in the blood of the Lamb. You cannot minister to Christ while the red fever is on your brow. He who has seraphim for his servitors wants not feverish services from souls diseased with iniquity. King Jesus wants no slaves to swell his train; you must be freed first from the yoke of sin, and then you shall become the servants of the Lord.

Listen to me, any fevered ones who are here, while I briefly describe how the Lord Jesus Christ ministered to this woman.

He ministered to her by *his presence*. His being in the room with her meant that salvation was come to her house. Beloved, believe

that Jesus Christ is here. To his ministers he has said, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." I want you to know that he is not shut up within the heavenly gates, but he is here, and his power to save is present in the midst of this assembly, and will be present in your room when you go home and fall upon your knees.

The next thing that blessed this woman was *his look*. "Jesus saw her." There is more here than appears upon the surface. You know what a physician means when he says, "I will come and see your sick child." He does not mean that he will barely look at it: he intends to search into the matter, study it, and see what can be done. Will you try to think that the Lord Jesus Christ sees you, that he reads your heart, knows your secret thoughts, hears your secret groanings, and notes your inward desires? He perceives the power which sin has over you, the difficulty you find in coming to him;—he sees it all, and knows how to deal with it. Not only is Jesus near at hand, but he is present with his eyes open, observing all that ails you. Seeing it with a mind which is deeply sympathetic, and a heart quick to relieve.

The next thing the Lord Jesus Christ used was, *his touch*. This is the healing point. He "took her by the hand, and lifted her up." There was a contact established. Oh, that glorious doctrine of the incarnation of Christ, there is healing in it! I do not mean in the doctrine but in the fact itself, that the Lord Jesus Christ took our flesh, and became man, "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." Thus he touches us, and heals us. Had he not been man he could not have died, and had he not died we must have died for ever. God in Christ Jesus is very near to thee, poor soul; so near to thee that if thou dost by faith touch the hem of his garment, thou art saved. If thou believest in the Lord Jesus, he is in contact with thee; his cool hand is grasping thy fevered hand; and as thy fever dissolves into him,—for "he himself bare our sicknesses"—his health flows into thee, so that thou mayest arise and minister unto him. Contact by faith with Jesus Christ our Lord is the ordained means of salvation.

And there was, beside this contact, another form of power; our Lord spake to the fever. *His word* is a word of might. If the touch of our Lord represents incarnation, his word represents resurrection; for by hearing the voice of the Son of God shall all the dead arise from their graves. His word is quickening; and where it falls it proves itself to be a living and incorruptible seed. By the word of the Lord, even by the gospel of Jesus, the fever of sin is driven out of men and women. Oh, that the Lord Jesus may now speak to you by these lips of mine,—speak with power almighty to your hearts! Oh, that thou, poor sin-sick sinner, may hear the word of the Lord with thine inner ears, for such hearing is eternal life! God help thee so to hear.

There is healing for thee; and I warn thee again that thou must have this healing before thou canst work for Jesus. Thy Lord must begin with thee ere thou canst begin with him. Do not go blundering out of the Tabernacle and say, "I will take a class in the Sunday-School"; "I will try to preach"; "I will give my money to the Lord's cause." No; stand back till thou art healed; weep and pray, and agonize till thou art healed. Thou must receive from Jesus all he has to give ere thou canst give aught to him.

This may sound harsh to you who mean well, but God forbid that I should bolster you up in a zeal for God which is not according to knowledge. Aliens cannot stand in the Lord's courts; ye must be made Israelites before ye can be priests unto God. First, salvation, then service.

III. Thirdly, it is plainly taught in the text that STRENGTH TO MINISTER COMES WITH HEALING. "Immediately she arose and ministered to them." Fever causes extreme weakness, and when it leaves the patient, he is for a considerable time greatly debilitated. The cures of nature are slow; but when Jesus cures, he does it at once. Though he uses only a touch and a word, yet he cures so perfectly that no weakness remains. The woman did not lie in bed a week or two, and feed upon nourishing diet, and so recover her strength; but there and then she arose from her bed, girt her garments about her, and went about the duties of the household. Is it not wonderful to see her haste to the kitchen, to prepare the evening meal for the Lord Jesus Christ and his friends? With gratitude beaming from her face, she placed each dish upon the table, and brought forth water with which her guests might wash their feet. The moment the Lord Jesus Christ saves a soul he gives that soul strength for its appointed service.

I want to call your attention to this, that her service was *immediate* service, rendered on the spot, without delay. Some of you have been converted during our late special services; let me bid you serve the Lord at once, even as the Lord has served you. "What, get to work directly?" Yes, immediately; for there is something very beautiful about that which is done by new converts. Oh, the beauty of that first look of love! Oh, the sweetness of those first notes of praise! Oh, the power of those first sentences of testimony! I do not find any fault with our dear old saints: there is a richness and maturity about them; but still my soul desireth the first ripe fruits. There is a pungency of flavour about the first berries of grace; and even a kind of tartness about them, which makes their taste all the more perceptible to those who are dull and careless. Give me fruit with the dew of the morning upon it. New blood in the veins of the church is a great promoter of its health and vigour. The first fruits are in some respects the best fruits. I would not have a converted person wait a week before trying to do something for Jesus. Run as soon as you find your feet.

But notice that what this good woman did was very *appropriate*. Peter's wife's mother did not get out of bed and go down the street and deliver an address to an assembled multitude. Women are best when they are quiet. I share the apostle Paul's feelings when he bade women be silent in the assembly. Yet there is work for holy women, and we read of Peter's wife's mother that she arose and ministered to Christ. She did what she could and what she should. She arose and ministered to him. Some people can do nothing that they are allowed to do, but waste their energies in lamenting that they are not called on to do other people's work. Blessed are they who do what they should do. It is better to be a good housewife, or nurse, or domestic servant, than to be a powerless preacher or a graceless talker. She did not arise and prepare a lecture, nor preach a sermon, but she arose and prepared a supper, and

that was what she was fitted to do. Was she not a housewife? As a housewife let her serve the Lord. I do not say that if you were converted a week ago you are at once to preach. No: but you are to minister to the Lord in the way for which you are best qualified, and that may happen to be by a living testimony to his grace in your daily calling. We greatly err when we dream that only a preacher can minister to the Lord; for Jesus has work of all sorts for all sorts of followers. Paul speaks of women who helped him much, and, assuredly, as there is no idle angel there ought to be no idle Christian. We are not saved for our own sakes, but that we may be of service to the Lord and to his people; let us not miss our calling.

When healed of her fever, Peter's wife's mother had strength to perform a *suitable* ministry, such as the peculiar occasion required. She did for Jesus and the three companions that which was needful there and then. Jesus had had a hard day's preaching, and that is hungry work: he had spent a heavy day in healing, and that is exhausting work; and now he wanted somewhat to eat, and therefore he came into Peter's house. The principal worker there was laid aside, and so our Lord did not ask for refreshment. He always thought of others before himself; and when he was faint and hungry he put back his own needs till he restored health to the fevered woman. This being done, the next necessary thing was that the wearied preacher and physician should be refreshed, and this the grateful woman attended to. When our Lord sat on the well and talked with the woman of Samaria, he was faint and weary, and asked for drink; but the claims of nature he put aside till he had preached the gospel to her. Then came the disciples with the meat which they had bought. On this occasion at Peter's house the refreshment was ministered by her who had just quitted her bed. "*She* arose and ministered to them." Now, dear friends, you that are converted may minister to Christ in a way which is as necessary as the service of his ablest preachers and pastors. There is something for you to do which will be a refreshment to him and to his servants. He condescendingly permits it, and will graciously accept it. You can personally minister to a personal Christ. You cannot do everything, but you can do something that will be acceptable to him. You may; you can; and you ought. Ministry to Jesus is practicable, permissible, acceptable, and obligatory. You owe your very life to him. Come, spend that life in his service. Immediately, this very day, minister to Jesus. If you have only been saved this day yet there is a somewhat incumbent for the day; and in its place it is as necessary to the glory of God as the ministry of cherubim and seraphim. Now then, do it. I will not urge you, because I can see in my last head something that will move you to it.

IV. THE DESIRE TO MINISTER ALWAYS ARISES OUT OF HEALING. Here was a woman, a poor woman, an old woman, a widow woman, one who had just been sick, and she desires at once to minister to Christ, and she can do it, and she does do it. How think you, was she moved to this? Was not it that *strength naturalty suggests* activity as soon as ever you get it? When you are very prostrate you do not want to do anything. You feel as if you must lie still; there is no power in you, and there is no industry in you; but persons who have recovered want something to do. Sometimes they try to do more than they can, such is the suggestion of

revived strength. Now, if the Lord has given you spiritual life, that life will want to work; if he has given you light, that light will shine. "Now candle, do not shine." Will the candle take any notice of you? No, it cannot help shining if it has been lighted. If Christ has given you his grace, and it is in you as a well of living water, it must flow out that others may drink. It is no use saying, "Water, do not flow; fountain, cease." The fountain cannot help it; it must send forth its streams; and it must be so with you. The strength God has given you in Christ suggests activity.

And then the *gratitude for this strength impels you to activity.* How can a man be still when Christ has spoken for him and delivered him? We read in the paper some time ago that the King of Italy, to his great honour, appeared in a court of law on behalf of a man brought up under charge of causing a death. The King had seen the accident, and he came forward as a common witness in the court to say that the horse had mastered the driver, and the man was not to be blamed. I do not know the name of the man, but I feel pretty sure that Jacobi or Antonio, whoever he may be, if ever King Humbert wants somebody to speak up for him will find a friend in him: he will say, "My King came into court and spoke for me, and I will as long as ever I live speak up for him." Now, the Lord Jesus Christ is an advocate for you, therefore be an advocate for him. Can you ever be silent for Christ now that the Lord Christ has redeemed you from the curse of the law and the penalty of sin? I tell you, if you can be quiet and do nothing for Christ, I am afraid you have never tasted of his love and grace.

Once more, I think I may say that those who are healed by Christ are sure to do something for him of the right sort, because *their former habitudes will assist them.* I do not mean by this that sinful activity can ever help us into holy activity, but I do mean this; that we can turn our old habits to account for Jesus. I believe that Peter's wife's mother was a particularly nice old lady. There is rather a prejudice against a wife's mother, and if Peter found it the proper thing to have her living in the house, I am sure she was a specially good woman. I have a picture of her in my mind's eye,—a dear old soul, always busy and happy. When there was nothing else to do she would mend the stockings, or do any commonplace work. She was always busy. You never had to ask her to work, she did it of her own accord. At cooking the meals and preparing everything for the house she was perfectly at home, never grumbling, never complaining, never setting the husband against the wife, but always looking out to do everything that possibly could be done to make the household go along in all its concerns with oiled wheels. When she had the fever she did not like to be laid aside; and so the moment she is restored, there she is at it. The ruling passion is strong now that death has been removed. She begins to serve Jesus, for she had always been serving somebody. When Jesus came into the house, with Peter, and James, and John, she could not bear to think that there was nothing for supper; but the moment she felt well, away she went to the kitchen, with all the utensils of her cookery craft, to prepare the best meal in her power. You people who, when you were not converted, were always active, ought to be doubly active now. In the family do all for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Those commonplace things,—sweeten and flavour them with love for him: reverence him and glorify him in all that you do. Is not there something you can do for your neighbour, something you can do for your children, some part of the Lord's work you can undertake?

As for you, young men who have been so restless, so vigorous, so dashing in sin, it seems to me that this habitual energy ought to be placed under consecration to Christ. A horse that has no mettle in it is easily managed; still, a horse with a little mettle, though he may kick, and plunge, and do a great deal of mischief, is all the better horse when he is broken in. If he be under proper management, if he answers to the bit, you like the mettle. So it is with a man when he is converted. If he had mettle in him that led him to kick and plunge when he served the devil, if he did so much mischief and damage against the kingdom of Christ, he is the very man to pull well in Jesus Christ's chariot. I pray the Master, therefore, that he will come and heal that young man of his feverishness and make his blood cool within him this day, and restore him by his grace. Oh that the Lord would touch all sick folk and make them healthy! Then when all are healed let us rise to serve him who has served us, and unto him be glory for ever and ever. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew viii. 1—17.

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A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, MAY 3RD, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON JUNE 2ND, 1884.

"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen."—1 Timothy i. 15—17.

WHEN Paul wrote this ever-memorable text, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," he placed it in connection with himself. I would have you carefully notice the context. Twelfth verse:—"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." You see, the apostle had spoken of himself, and then it was that the Holy Spirit put it into his mind to write of the glorious salvation of which he was so notable a subject. Truly it was a seasonable and suggestive connection in which to place this glorious gospel text. What he preached to others was to be seen in himself.

When I read to you the story of Saul's conversion, suppose I had finished it by making the remark, "This is a faithful saying, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," you would all have said, "That is true, and it is a natural inference from the narrative." Such a remark would have served as the moral of the whole story. It is an easy and a simple inference from such a conversion, that Christ Jesus must have come into the world to save sinners. See, then, why Paul uttered it in this particular place. He could not help bringing his own case forward; but when he did bring it forward it was to add emphasis

to this declaration that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. It is my conviction that our Lord in infinite wisdom intends that his ministers should themselves be proofs of the doctrines which they teach. If a young man, a very young man, stands up to tell you of the experience of an aged Christian, you say at once, "That may be very true, but *you* cannot prove it, for you are not an aged person yourself." If one who has been privileged in the providence of God to enjoy the comforts of life stands up to preach upon the consolations of the Spirit in poverty, you say, "Yes, that is very true, but you cannot speak from experience yourself." Hence the Lord likes his servants to have such an experience that their testimony shall have a man at the back of it. He would have their lives sustain and explain their testimonies. When Paul said that Christ came into the world to save sinners, his own conversion, his own joy in the Lord, were proof positive of it. He was a witness who had tasted and handled the good Word of life to which he witnessed.

Paul went to heaven years ago, but his evidence is not vitiated by that fact; for a truthful statement is not affected by the lapse of time. If a statement was made yesterday, it is just as truthful as if you were hearing it to-day; and if it were made, as this was, eighteen hundred years ago, yet, if true then (and nobody disputed it in Paul's day), it is true now. The facts recorded in the gospels are as much facts now as ever, and they ought to have the same influence upon our minds as they had upon the minds of the apostles. At this moment the statement that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners has Paul still at the back of it. "He being dead yet speaketh." Oh, you who are burdened with your sins, I want you to see Saul of Tarsus before you at this moment, and to hear him say, with penitent voice, in your presence, "The Lord Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." Doubt not the statement, for the man is the evidence of it. He who saved Paul can save you: yea, he is willing now to display his power upon you. Be not disobedient to the heavenly message.

But, beloved, if we have not Paul in our midst to bear his personal witness we have still many living proofs: we have indisputable evidence in those that are still about us that it "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." I could summon to this pulpit scores who were literally the blackest of transgressors, but they are washed, and sanctified, and so they are living arguments of the Lord's power to save. Many also are now present who could not be numbered by their fellow-men among the chief of sinners in certain aspects of the case, yet they most willingly put themselves down as the chief of sinners under some other way of viewing it, and they bear their testimony, as I do to-night, that Jesus is able to save unto the uttermost. I, who now stand before you, am a living witness that Christ Jesus can save sinners, and does save them still. The Lord has forgiven and justified me, and I have found grace in his sight. In my case, also, it is proven that it "is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Oh, how I wish that my hearers would believe me! Many of you would accept any statement which I should make; why do you not accept this? You do not think me a liar,—why, then, do you not

believe my testimony concerning Jesus? He is as ready to save to-day as he was of old. He is ready to save *you* if you will trust him.

The run of thought at this time will be, first, concerning those *who are the chief of sinners;* secondly, we will enquire *why God has saved them;* and thirdly, *what they say when they are saved.*

I. First, then, WHO ARE THE CHIEF OF SINNERS? Paul says that he was the chief. I think, however, that he was only one of the regiment. There are different classes of sinners, and some are greater and some less. All men are truly sinners, but all men are not equally sinners. They are all in the mire; but they have not all sunk to an equal depth in it. It is true they have all fallen deep enough to perish in sin, unless the grace of God prevent; yet there are differences in the degrees of guilt, and there will doubtless be differences in the degrees of punishment.

Some are the chief of sinners in the same way as the apostle Paul, for *they have persecuted the church of God.* Paul, who was then called Saul, had given his vote against Stephen; and when Stephen was stoned, he kept the clothes of them that murdered him. He felt that blood lying upon his soul long afterward, and he bemoaned it. Would not you, if you had been a helper at the murder of some child of God, feel that you were among the chief of sinners? If you had been willingly and wilfully, maliciously and eagerly, a helper in putting a man of God like Stephen to death, you would write yourself down as a sinner of crimson dye? Why, I think that I should say, "God may forgive me, but I will never forgive myself." It would seem such a horrid crime to lie upon one's soul. Yet this was merely a beginning. Saul was like a leopard, who, having once tasted blood, must always have his tongue in it. His very breath was threatening, and his delight was slaughter. He harassed the people of God: he made great havoc of the saints: he compelled them, he says, to blaspheme: he had them beaten in the synagogues, driven from city to city, and even put to death. This must have remained upon his heart as a dark memory, even after the Lord Jesus Christ had fully forgiven him. When he knew, as Paul did know, that he was a justified man through the righteousness of Jesus Christ, yet he must always have felt a smiting at his heart to think that these innocent lambs had been worried by him; that for no other reason but that they were lovers of the Crucified, he had panted for their blood. This matter of deadly persecution placed Saul head and shoulders above other sinners. This was the top-stone of the pyramid of his sin, "because I persecuted the church of Christ." I thank God that there is no man here who has that particular form of sin upon his conscience in having actually put to death or joined in the slaughter of any child of God. The laws of our country have happily prevented your being stained with that foul offence, and I bless the Lord that it is so. Yet if there should be such among those who are hearing these words, or among those who shall one day read them, I must confess that they are, indeed, numbered among the chief of sinners, and I pray God to grant that they may obtain mercy as Saul did.

But you can go very near to this; in all probability certain of you have done so. That husband who has threatened his wife so bitterly if

she obeys her conscience, that man who has discharged his servant for no other reason but his fidelity to Christ, that landlord who has turned out his cottager from his home because he held a religious service beneath his roof, that man who has wilfully and maliciously slandered a servant of God, not because he did him any harm, but because he cannot bear to hear of any truly following after Christ—these are the people who must be reckoned among the chief of sinners. They have done no murder, but they have gone as far as they dare to go, and their heart is full of venom against the people of God: this is a grievous crime. Though it may seem a very small thing to grieve a pious child, or to vex a poor, godly woman, God does not think it so. He remembers jests and scoffs levelled at his little ones, and he bids those who indulge in them to take heed. You had better offend a king than one of the Lord's little ones. That poor man in the workshop, who has so hard a time of it with your jests and chaff, has a Friend in the heavens. That other man who, seeking the Lord, has found the cold shoulder in society, has an Advocate on high, who will not see him despised without espousing his cause. It may appear a trifle to make a saint the target of ridicule, but his Father in heaven does not think so. I know this, that many patient men will bear a great deal, but if you strike their children, their blood is up, and they will not have it. A father will not stand by to see his child abused, and the Great Father above is as tender and fond as any other father. You have seen among birds and beasts that they will put forth all their strength for their young: a hen, naturally very timid, will fight for her little chicks with all the courage of a lion. Some of the smallest of animals, and the least powerful, nevertheless become perfectly terrible when they are taking care of their offspring; and think you that the everlasting God will bear to see his children maligned, and slandered, and abused, for their following of him? Is the God of nature without natural affection? I trow not. You shall rue the day, sir, in which you took up arms against the people of God. Humble yourself before God on account of it, otherwise you will be numbered among the chief of sinners, and the chief of punishments shall be meted out to you.

I have no doubt that there may be some of that kind here; and, if there are, I can only pray that the story of Saul of Tarsus may be repeated in them by boundless grace. May they even yet come to preach the gospel which now they despise. It is no new thing for the priest to be converted to Christ. It is no new thing for the opposer to become the advocate, and to be all the better and more powerful a pleader because of the mischief which he formerly did. Oh that the Lord would turn his foes into friends! God send it! For Christ's sake may he send it now!

Further, among the chief of sinners we must of course reckon *those who are guilty of the coarser and grosser sins.* I will not occupy a moment in mentioning what they are, for it is a shame even to speak of them. God keep us from unchastity and dishonesty,—from any one of those sins which are censurable even under the head of common morality; for, if not—if we indulge in these—we shall certainly come by them to be numbered among the chief of sinners. I must, however, mention blasphemy and lewd speaking, because these are unhappily far

too common. Does a man think that he can go on damning his own body and soul in so many words, and never provoke the Lord to anger? Does he dream that he can use foul and filthy words, and wicked oaths, without incurring sin? I believe that these things bring the blackest guilt on the conscience; for God has expressly said that he will by no means hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. It is true of every sin that God will not hold a man guiltless who does it; but it is especially said about this sin, because men are apt to fancy that words are of no great importance, or that God takes no notice thereof. Even the thoughtless or trifling repetition of the name of the Lord involves great sin, for thus a man taketh the sacred name in vain. Yet men trifle with that name in common conversation, and that with fearful frequency. There is no excuse for this wanton wickedness, because it brings neither profit nor pleasure to the person who so offends. What practical end can it serve? As George Herbert said long ago,

> "Lust and wine plead a pleasure, avarice gain:
> But the cheap swearer through his open sluice
> Lets his soul run for nought, as little fearing:
> Were I an *Epicure*, I could bate swearing."

I am unable to frame an excuse for profane language: it is needless wilful wickedness. Men talk so as to horrify us: they chill our blood with fear lest God should take them at their word; and all for nothing at all. I would to God that every blasphemer here (if such there be, and I have no doubt that there are), would abandon that vile, inexcusable, useless habit, which lowers men in society, defiles them before God, and ensures their condemnation. Filthy speech puts those who are guilty of it among the chief of sinners, and to them will certainly be meted out a terrible vengeance in that day when God shall solemnly curse those who have so glibly cursed themselves. It will be an awful thing for the man who used profane imprecations to find out at last that his prayers were heard, and that they will be answered. O swearer, beware lest the Lord God hear thy prayers at once to thine everlasting confusion! Sit down at this moment in deep contrition, and weep to think of the many times in which thou hast defied the God of heaven, and uttered words of provocation against the God in whose hand thy breath is. Not yet has he cut thee down. Oh, wonder of mercy! Take heed to thyself. Above all, marvel that there should be mention of mercy for such a one as thou art.

Now, dear friends, there are other chiefs among sinners who do not go in for these grosser sins at all. Let me mention them, for in this line I shall have to place myself and many of you. Those are among the chief of sinners *who have sinned against great light*, and against the influences of holy instruction, and gracious example. Children of godly parents, who have been brought up and instructed in the fear of God from their youth, are among the chief of sinners if they turn aside from the way of life. When they transgress, there is a heavy weight about their fault, which is not to be found in the common sin of the children of the slums, or the arabs of the gutter. The offspring of the degraded know no better, poor souls, and hence their transgressions are sins of ignorance; but those who do know better, when they transgress,

transgress with an emphasis. Their sin is as a talent of lead; and it shall hang about their necks like a millstone. I remember how this came home to my heart when I was convinced of my sin. I had not engaged in any of the grosser vices, but then I had not been tempted to them, but had been carefully guarded from vicious influences. But I lamented that I had been disobedient to my parents, proud in spirit, forgetful of God's commands: I knew better—knew better from the very first, and this put me in my own estimation among the chief of sinners. It had cost me much to do evil, for I had sinned against the clearest light. Especially is this the case when the possession of knowledge is accompanied by much tenderness of conscience. There are some of you unconverted people, who, when you do wrong, feel that you have done wrong, and feel it keenly too, even though no one rebukes you for it. You cannot be unjust, or hasty in temper, or faulty in speech, or break the Sabbath, or do anything that is forbidden, without your conscience troubling you. You know what it is to go to bed and lie awake in misery, after some questionable amusement, or after having spoken too frivolously. Yours is a tender conscience; do not violate it, or you will be doubly guilty. When God puts the bit into your mouth, if you try to get it between your teeth, and it does not check you at all, you must mind what you are at, for you may be left to dash onward to destruction. "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." It puts men among the chief of sinners when against light and against conscience they deliberately choose the way of evil, and leave the commandments of the Lord.

Especially is it a grievous offence *to sin against the gentle checking of the Holy Spirit.* Have you not been sad offenders upon this point? You felt the other Sunday night that if you could once get out of the chapel, and get home, you would bow the knee in prayer; *but you did not.* You have felt like that many times, and you have shaken off the feeling; and now a sermon scarcely moves you: it had need be full of thunder and lightning to make you turn a hair. Truths which used to make you shake from head to foot scarcely affect you now. Take care, I pray you; for he that sins against the Holy Ghost may find himself water-logged by sin, so as to be no longer able to move his vessel towards the shores of salvation. Nothing hardens like the gospel when it is long trifled with. To lie asoak in the truth without receiving it into the heart is sure destruction. To die on holy ground is to die indeed. God grant that it may not be so with any here!

Yet if you be this day the chief of sinners, do not despair, nor turn away in sullen anger; for we are going to say to you, at this hour, in the name of the merciful God, that his Son, Jesus Christ, has come into the world to save sinners, even the very chief.

I think that I must put down those among the chief of sinners *who have led others into sin.* Ah, this is a sad, sad, sad, sad subject! If you have led others astray, if you yourself seek the Lord, and are saved, yet you cannot save them. If it be young persons whom you have polluted with evil, you cannot take the wretched stain out of their minds. You can leave off sowing the devil's seed, but you cannot gather up what you have sown, nor prevent its growing and ripening. Fire is easily kindled, but not so soon extinguished when it has taken hold upon the

fuel. It is an awful fact that there may be souls in hell whom you have sent there! It was a wise penitential prayer of a converted man who had exercised influence for evil,—"Lord, forgive me my other men's sins." When you lead others to sin, their sins are to a large extent your sins. They do not cease to be the sins of those who commit them, but they are also the sins of those who promoted or suggested them by precept or example. A bad example, a lewd expression, an unholy life, may be the means of drawing others down to perdition; and those that destroy others, and so are soul-murderers, are among the chief of sinners. He who uses dagger or pistol to the body is abhorred; what shall we say of those who poison human minds, and stab at the heart of piety? These are guiltiest of the guilty. Woe unto them!

Especially must I rank him among the chief of sinners who has preached falsehood,—who has denied the deity of Christ—who has undermined the inspiration of Scripture—who has struggled against the faith, fought against the atonement, and done evil even as he could in the scattering of scepticism. He must take his place among the ringleaders in diabolical mischief: he is a master destroyer, a chosen apostle of the prince of darkness. Oh, that he might be brought by sovereign grace to be among the foremost teachers of that faith which hitherto he has destroyed! I think that we should do well as Christian people if we prayed more for any who make themselves notorious by their infidelity. If we talked less bitterly against them, and prayed more sweetly for them, good would come of it. Of political argument against atheists we have had enough, let us carry the case into a higher court, and plead with God about them. If we use the grand artillery of heaven by importunate prayer, we should be using much better weapons than are commonly employed. God help us to pray for all false teachers that they may be converted to God, and so display the omnipotence of his love.

I shall not say more upon this mournful matter, for, indeed, I have only mentioned these examples in the hope that some here present may confess, "I am sorry to say that the preacher means me. Under some aspect or other I must take my place among the chief of sinners."

II. Now, secondly, WHY ARE THE CHIEF OF SINNERS SO OFTEN SAVED? The Lord Jesus Christ, when he went into heaven, took with him one of the chief of sinners as a companion: the dying thief entered Paradise the self-same day as our Lord. After our Lord Jesus had gone to heaven, so far as I know, he never did save more than one person by his own immediate instrumentality; and that one person was this very apostle Paul, who has given us our text. To him our Lord spake personally from heaven, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" To him he revealed himself by the way, and called him to be his apostle, even to this man who truthfully called himself the chief of sinners. It is wonderful to think that it should be so: but grace delights in dealing with great and glaring sin, and putting away the crying crimes of great offenders.

The Lord Jesus not only saved the chief of sinners, but he was related to some of them by blood. Look through the long line of our Lord's genealogy. You know that doctrine, the last invention of Rome, concerning the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. I am going to tell you a doctrine which is about as far apart from that as the east

is from the west. In the genealogy of our blessed Lord we find the names of certain of the chief of sinners. Three women especially hold a position in it, who were each notorious for sin. Not many women are mentioned, but among the first is Tamar, guilty of incest. The next is Rahab the harlot, and a third is Bathsheba the adulteress. This is a crooked pedigree, an ancestral tree whose branches are more than a little gnarled and twisted. Admire the condescension of our Lord in coming of such a stock. He came *of* sinners, because he came *for* sinners. According to the flesh he comes of sinners that sinners may come to him. There was mixed in the veins through which flowed his ancestry the blood of Ruth the Moabitess, a heathen, brought in on purpose that we Gentiles might see how truly he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh. I say not that there was any defilement in his humanity, God forbid; for he was not born after the manner of men, so as to be polluted in that fashion; but still I say that his genealogy includes many great sinners in order that we may see how closely he allied himself with them, how thoroughly he undertook their cause. Read the roll of his ancestry, and you will see that David is there, who cried, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned"; and Solomon, who loved strange women; and Rehoboam, his foolish son; and Manasseh "who shed innocent blood very much," and worse men than they, if worse could be. Such sinners as these are in the genealogy of the Saviour of sinners. "He was numbered with the transgressors." He was called "The friend of publicans and sinners." It was said of him, "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." Still he delights to save great sinners. O my hearer, it will delight him to save *you!*

Why does he do it? The apostle says, in the sixteenth verse, "For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering." What, is that his reason for saving a sinner? It is that he may show in that sinner his long-suffering, revealing his patience and forgiveness. In a great sinner like Paul he shows *all* his long-suffering, not little grains of it, nor portions of it, but *all* his long-suffering. Is Jesus Christ willing to show forth all his long-suffering? Does he delight to unveil all his love? Yes; for remember that he calls his mercy his riches: "he is rich in mercy." I do not find that he calls his power his riches, but he calls his grace his riches, "in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Oh, dear friends, the Lord, who is rich in mercy, seeks a treasury in which to put his riches; he wants a casket for the sacred jewellery of his love; and these atrocious criminals, these great offenders, these who think themselves black as hell, these are the very men in whom there is space for his rare jewels of goodness. Where sin has abounded there is elbow-room for the infinite mercy of the living God. Ought you not to be encouraged, if you feel yourself greatly guilty, that God delights to show forth all his patience by saving great sinners? Will you not at once seek that *all* long-suffering may be shown in your case? Believe on the Lord Jesus, and it shall be so.

And what does Paul say next? He says that the Lord saved him *for a pattern* to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. For a pattern. It means for a type or specimen. Paul was a "proof before letters." The first prints of an engraving are sharp and clear,

and therefore they are very valuable: they exhibit the productive power of the plate at its highest point, before the surface is worn down in the least degree. Paul was one of the proof-engravings taken off the plate in the earliest days, and under the most favourable circumstances for bringing out every line of grace. All God's long-suffering was seen in him for a pattern. I would to God that we could put some of you under that same engraved plate, and issue more impressions at this very hour; for the plate is not worn out: the type that God uses is as new as ever. When a printer sets his type, he sends to the author a sheet to let him see what the type is, and he calls it his proof. So also Paul was God's proof—one of the first taken off by the glorious machinery of grace to let us all see what God has to say to us concerning long-suffering love. That printing-machine is at work at this very moment: it is making impressions at this hour, most clear, sharp, and readable. I would to God that some great sinner here would be like the paper laid under the type to take the impression of almighty grace. A grand edition of the Work of Love was issued before Paul was printed off, and published; I refer to the time when Peter preached at Pentecost. Many large and splendid editions have been issued from that press since. I see before me a whole library that God has printed in this house—the proofs that God has taken of late years from the old standing type; but Paul stands at the head of the list as a fine first proof of what God can do.

Then God can save *me*. I came to that conclusion a year ago, and putting it to the test, I found it true. Dear fellow sinners, come to the same conclusion! Who are you? No, I do not ask you to tell me. I do not want to know. God knows. But I want you to come to this conclusion,—"If Paul is a specimen of saved ones, then why should not I be saved? If Paul had been unique, a production quite by himself, then we might justly have doubted as to ourselves; but since he is a pattern, we may all hope to see the Lord's long-suffering repeated in ourselves." Nowadays, by the Parcels' Post, people are sending you patterns of all sorts of things, and many articles are bought according to sample. When you buy from a pattern you expect the goods to be like the pattern. So God sends us Paul as a pattern of his great mercy to great sinners. He thus says, in effect,—"That is the kind of thing I do. I take this rough, bad material of the chief of sinners, and I renew it, and show forth all my mercy in it. This is what I am prepared to do with you." Poor soul, will you not accept the mercy of God? Enter into this salvation business with the Lord, that you, too, like the apostle, being a sinner, may become like him in obtaining the glorious salvation which is in Christ Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners. I am talking very plainly and simply to you; but if you love your own souls you will be all the better pleased to listen. I do not want to amuse you, but to see you saved. Do, I pray you, bend your minds to this subject, and learn that there is good hope for the worst of you if you will cry unto the Lord.

That is why Jesus saves those who have most grievously erred, that he may display them as specimens of what his grace can do.

"But I belong to such a wicked family," cries one. Oh, yes; and many have been saved who belonged to the most depraved and degraded

of families. They have entered into relationship with Christ, and their own base condition has been swallowed up in his glory. The children of criminals when converted belong to the family of God. "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name."

"Oh, but I have indulged in such horrible vices." This is a sad confession, but it does not doom you to despair, for the blood of Jesus washes away the worst of filth. Blasphemers, adulterers, drunkards, thieves—"such," O ye saints—"such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified"; and why should not others of like character be washed and sanctified too?

III. I must close by dwelling a moment on the third head, which is this—WHAT THE CHIEF OF SINNERS SAY WHEN THEY ARE SAVED. What they say is recorded in the text. It reads like a hymn:—"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen." See, the first word is "*Now*." As soon as ever they are saved they begin praising the Lord. They cannot endure to put off glorifying God. Some one might whisper to them, "You will praise God when you get to heaven." "No," replies the gracious soul, "I am going to praise him now. *Now* unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be glory for ever and ever." Grateful love cannot be restrained, it is like fire in the bones. Our heart would break for love if it could not find a means of expressing itself at once.

Does another person whisper, "When you praise God, do not be too long about it. Leave off as soon as you have moderately praised and adored. Do not be for ever engaged in the work of praise." "No," says the saved man, "I cannot have done while life lasts,—'To him be honour and glory *for ever and ever.*'" Not only for ever: that might seem to be long enough; but "for ever and ever." It is a redundant expression, such as enthusiasm delights to use: it indicates a sort of double eternity. The saved sinner can never have enough of glorifying the Lord; he will praise him throughout eternity. As soon as a man is cleansed from sin, he is clothed with praise. A new song is put into his mouth, and he must sing it: he cannot help doing so. There is no stopping him.

Notice what titles Paul here heaps together. First, he calls the Lord Jesus Christ *a King*. "Now unto the King eternal." Or apply it to God the Ever-Blessed, in his sacred unity, if you will: he calls the Lord King, for he would give him the loftiest name, and pay him the lowliest homage. He calls him a King, for he had found him so; for it is a king that distributes life and death, a king that pardons rebels, a king that reigns and rules over men. Jesus was all this to Paul, and much more, and so he must needs give him the royal title: he cannot speak of him as less than majestic. If Jesus is not King to all the world, at least he is King to the man whose sins have been forgiven him. "Now," says he, "unto the King eternal be honour and glory for ever and ever."

See how he puts it, "the King *eternal*." Not a king that will lose his kingdom; not a king who will cease to reign, or abdicate, or die. Oh, dear brethren, the King that pardoned Paul is a King to-day.

equally mighty to save. Eighteen hundred years after his great deed of grace to the chief of sinners he is still a King.

> "Jesus sits on Zion's hill :
> He can save poor sinners still."

He sits upon the throne of mercy in the sovereignty of his grace, in the splendour of his love, in the majesty of his power, passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin. Will you not bow before him ? Here at this moment I pause to do him reverence,—Glory be to the Lord Jesus, for he is the King eternal!

Then he calls him the King *immortal.* He is the King that ever lives by his own power, and is therefore able to give life to dead souls. Blessed be the name of the Saviour that he died for sinners, but equally blessed be his name that he ever liveth to make intercession for sinners, and is therefore able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by him. The quickened, raised-up spirit cries aloud, "Glory be unto the King immortal, for he has made me immortal by the touch of his life-giving hand!" Because he lives, we shall live also. Our life is hidden in him, and throughout eternity we shall reign with him.

Then Paul styles him the King *invisible;* for as yet we see not all things put under him, and his reign is perceived rather by faith than by sight. The Lord Jesus is to mortal eyes invisible, and therefore our service must be rendered by the spirit rather than through the senses. He must be trusted if we are to draw near to him, and we must say of him, "whom having not seen we love." An unseen Lord, who can only be known to our faith, has saved us, and will save us, world without end. We have not a King that we have seen or touched, or whose voice we have audibly heard; but ours is a King who is invisible, and yet moveth to and fro among us, mighty to save. Thanks be unto the Holy Spirit for giving us eyes of faith to see him that is invisible, and hearts to trust and to rest upon an invisible Lord!

"Now, now, now, now, now, now, now," that is the word for every saved soul. *Now* unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, be endless glory. Do you not respond to the call by immediate praise? Do you not say, "Awake up my glory! Awake, psaltery and harp"? Oh, for a seraph's coal to touch these stammering lips! As a sinner saved by my Lord and King, I would fain pour out my life in a continual stream of praise to my redeeming Lord.

Furthermore, our apostle speaks of *the only wise God.* He is so wise that he saves great sinners to make them patterns of his mercy; so wise that he takes bigots and persecutors to make them into apostles; so wise that he makes the wrath of man to praise him, and the very wickedness of man he uses as a foil to set forth the brightness of the glory of his grace. Unto the only wise God, wise enough to turn a lion into a lamb, wise enough to make a sinner a saint, a persecutor a preacher, an enemy a friend—to him be glory. Oh, the wisdom of God in the plan of redemption! It is a deep unfathomable. Compared with it there is no wisdom elsewhere, and God is seen to be "only wise."

To him *be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.* Unto him be glory on earth and glory in heaven, honour from all of us poor imperfect beings, and glory from us when he shall have made us perfectly meet to

behold his face. Come, lift up your hearts, ye saved ones! Begin at once the songs which shall never cease. The saints shall never have done singing, for they remember that they were sinners. Come, poor sinner, out of the depths extol him who descended into the depths for you! Chief of sinners, adore him who is to you the Chief among ten thousand, and the Altogether Lovely! You black sinners, who have gone to the very brink of damnation by your abominable sins, rise to the utmost heights of enthusiastic joy in Jesus your Lord! Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, and all manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto you; and at the receipt of such a pardon you shall burst out into new-made doxologies to God your Saviour. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." O ye guiltiest of the guilty, the apostle Paul speaks to you, and stands before you as the bearer of God's white flag of mercy. Surrender to the King eternal, and there is pardon for you, and deliverance from the wrath to come. Thirty-five years Paul lived in sin. Twenty years after that, when he was older than I am, he wrote these words, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." Is there not some thirty-five years' old fellow here to-night who had better turn over a new leaf? Is there not some woman here of that age who has had more than enough of sin? Is it not time that you turned unto the Lord and found a new and better life? Turn them, Lord: turn them, and they shall be turned! Make them live and they shall live unto thee, world without end. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts. ix. 1—31.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—546, 588, 551.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE GOOD ANANIAS: A LESSON FOR BELIEVERS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, APRIL 26TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord."—Acts ix. 10.

AT this season we are called upon to think of foreign missions. As members of the Baptist Missionary Society we are in happy and hopeful circumstances. God is smiling upon the work both at home and abroad, and raising up men whose hearts are in the cause. Last year the society was in arrears: it has expended very much more money this year than last year, and yet it has paid its way, is clear of debt, and begins the year with a balance in hand: for this we are very thankful, not only because the money is needful to defray the charges of the holy service, but because it shows that the churches have confidence in the Missionary Society, and that they are awakening to their responsibility concerning it. The more believers in the Lord Jesus consider the matter, the more will they see that it is the duty and the privilege of all who know the Lord to make him known to others. There was a time when Christian people thought it idle to send missionaries to the heathen, but that time only survives in regretful memories. We remember reading that in a Scotch assembly a Moderate minister, famous in his day, talked of the proposal to send missionaries to the heathen as the greatest absurdity to which he had ever listened: one who was of another mind cried out, "Reach me that Bible;" and when the Bible was opened, and he began to point to its teachings, the caviller was silenced. Are there any such cavillers yet alive? If there are, they are wise enough to hold their tongues. No reviewer in our day would dare to sneer at "consecrated cobblers"; for they remember Carey, and tremble in their shoes. Brethren, we are to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. This is our Captain's orders, and it would be treason to disobey. We have acted negligently towards this commission far too long; it is high time that we awakened from our sinful slumbers. May many a man and woman among us be called to mission work, and may the rest be eager to help them by their generous gifts.

What subjects have risen before me while thinking of a discourse

upon missions! Many grand and exiting themes have tempted me. The coming of the Lord, the conquest of nations to his sway, the reign of peace, the overthrow of falsehood, and all manner of glorious topics invite me; but something less ambitious has won my thoughts. It lies upon my heart not to speak of things upon a great scale, above our present power, but to talk of practical matters within the reach of common Christians. I shall not, therefore, treat of the Millennial reign, but of the kingdom of Christ in your soul and mine, and of how we can increase his dominions and cause his kingdom to come with power. I had rather speak five words to practical purpose than fifty thousand for oratorical effect. I have selected my text that we may see what can be done by private Christians, and learn how we can personally serve the Lord and become links in the great chain of his gracious dispensation. The mass of us cannot go abroad as missionaries, but we can all be messengers for Christ in our own city. We cannot all preach, but we can all pray. We cannot all give money, but we can all fill the treasury of supplication. The question for each one to ask is—"Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do?" What can I do with a household about me? What can I do, who can only take rank as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, without special office in the church? It seems to me that Ananias may serve as a typical person, and that his history may furnish us with many useful lessons.

Brethren, I shall invite you this morning to think about this good Ananias, to whom the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias; and he said, Behold, I am here, Lord."

I. First, let us think a little about THE MAN. He is described as "a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias." We hear of him this once, and we know nothing more about him. He comes forward at a critical point in Paul's life; executes for him a very useful office, and then disappears. The good soldier was sent upon special service by his Captain, and when he had fulfilled his commission he retired to his ordinary place in the ranks. Who was this Ananias?

We remark of him, first, that he was *simply a private person.* He is not described as pastor, or evangelist, or even as deacon or elder of a church: yet this private person, obscure in life, and without special distinction in the church, was the channel for communicating the Holy Ghost to the great apostle of the Gentiles. For the time being he became one of the most important persons in sacred history. The Lord did not send to Paul for the opening of his eyes and the comforting of his heart an apostle, lest any should have said that Paul received his commission at second-hand from those already in office. The Lord did not send to him any man of distinguished position or eminent gifts, lest it should be concluded that Paul received the gospel at his hands. The great apostle could say in after days, "I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." It was needful that instrumentality should be used, but it was wise that such instrumentality should be of the most ordinary kind, lest any power should be ascribed to it, and lest it should arrogate to itself credit for the apostle's conversion and after-life. I see, therefore, in many of you, dear brethren, special qualifications for certain uses, even qualifications which your being church officers or preachers might take from you

your very obscurity and want of glittering talent may be a fitness for peculiar service. There is a special work for you to do who are private Christians, and I trust you will be prompt in the doing of it.

Ananias is especially said to have been *a disciple*. Dwell on that title. He was a learner, he sat at Jesus' feet and learned of him, and therefore was ready to instruct Saul of Tarsus. A true disciple is also a follower; he is an imitator of his Master. Christ's discipleship is always practical, it is of the heart and of the hand as well as of the head; all these were wanted in the mission of Ananias to Paul. Oh, brothers and sisters, we must take care that we keep up the character of disciples. May we bear fruit, so shall we be his disciples. Let us never dream of knowing more than our Master teaches us; let us never think that we are perfect, so that we have no more to learn. He who gets beyond a disciple rises beyond his proper place. Our strength for usefulness lies in our remaining disciples. You cannot disciple all nations unless you are disciples yourselves. How can you teach others that which Christ does not teach you? But if you sit at his feet and receive of his words then shall you speak so that others shall learn of you.

Paul tells us, in Acts xxii. 12, that Ananias was "*a devout man.*" How much I wish that all avowed disciples of Jesus were devout men. I suppose he was devout while he was yet a Jew, before he received Christ; but when he was enlightened another element entered into his devotions, so that he worshipped God in the name of Jesus. Nowadays we greatly need more devout men, men of prayer, men who dwell with God in secret; devoted men, men of devotion: for the strength of the spirit of man lies in fellowship with the Spirit of God. A devout man is soon discovered: this fire from heaven cannot be hid. The devout man may not be more sombre than others; why should he be? He certainly will not be more anxious to make a display; but it will soon be seen that he is more full of power. A devout man is a remarkable man. If he prays, you perceive that he is familiar with that holy exercise; if he is called to endure trial, his patience proves that he submits himself to God. His daily conduct in the affairs of this life exhibits a secret sacred something which few understand, but which all feel. The Spirit of God dwells with the devout man, and fits him for the Lord's service. I believe that God loves to send as his special messengers those who ordinarily dwell near him. Let us aim to abide with God, that we may be employed by him. Every Christian man cannot be a talented man, but every Christian should be a devout man: every man cannot be eloquent, but every man who loves the Lord may be devout; and in that devotion lies a main qualification for service. He that has power with God will not fail to have power with men.

Paul also tells us that Ananias had "*a good report* of all the Jews which dwell in Damascus." They hated Christians, but they could not help respecting this devout man. The world had then, as it still has, a respect for those who walk with God. If we are to be useful to our fellow-men, we must deserve their esteem. We are not to curry favour with them by lowering our principles to gain their approbation; but, on the contrary, we are to win their respect by sheer force of unbending holiness, that so we may have power over them for their good. We are to win influence over our fellow-men by an upright character,

and a generous behaviour; so that if they wish to speak against us, they may find no matter for accusation except it be concerning our zeal for the Lord our God. Oh, that our church-members were all men of spotless character! Oh, that all professors were well reported of! The church is injured in her efforts for the conversion of the world by the inconsistencies of certain of her members. Let us provide things honest in the sight of all men, and by our lives adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things, and then we shall be prepared for the Lord's use among our neighbours.

This, then, was Ananias, a disciple towards Christ, devout towards God, and upright towards men.

Another qualification of Ananias for the work which the Lord put upon him was *his general thoughtfulness for the church of God.* This comes out in his own words. It is evident that he thought about the persecutions of his brethren. He says concerning Paul, the persecutor, "I have heard by many of this man." No doubt he had frequently made Paul the subject of conversation; for he was grieved at the afflictions of the saints in Jerusalem, and he feared for his brethren in Damascus. Observe that he is the first to call Christians "saints," or holy ones. He had evidently observed the followers of Jesus, and had noticed with delight this point of their character. It is well to speak frequently of matters which concern Christ's kingdom. Ananias was in sympathy with tried saints, was deeply touched by the story of their trials, and could not forbear to dwell upon their sorrowful experiences. All the servants of God who are what they should be take a great interest in the condition of the church of God; they bear one another's burdens, and share each other's griefs. They do not go in and out of their pews on a Sunday, and then fancy that their connection with the church is ended; but they bear upon their hearts the interests of Zion. They hang their harps upon the willows if she is captive, and they rejoice when they see her enjoying prosperity; they take pleasure in her stones, and favour the dust thereof. It is one mark that a man is right towards God when he is right towards the family of God. All that belongs to Jesus belongs to me if I belong to Jesus. All the interests of his kingdom are my interests if I am truly walking in fellowship with my Lord.

See, then, the man Ananias: there is nothing brilliant about him, he by no means claims distinguished rank; but he is, what I pray we may all be, a vessel fit for the Master's use, cleansed, prepared, consecrated, set apart unto God. Hence he was used of the Lord.

II. Now, secondly, let us consider HIS POSTURE. This is seen at once in his answer to the divine call. The voice said to him, "Ananias," and he answered, "Behold, I am here, Lord." He was familiar with the Old Testament; he remembered how the Lord said, "Abraham," and the patriarch answered, "Here am I." He remembered how the young child, Samuel, when the Lord said to him, "Samuel, Samuel," answered, "Here am I." He recollected how the prophet, when he saw the excellent glory, and heard the voice saying, "Who will go for us?" responded, "Here am I, send me!" He made the same answer, because his mind was full of Scripture, and also because he could not find a better reply; for the words were few, and reverent, and very fully expressive of what he felt.

Did not this indicate that his heart was *responsive* to the Divine voice? "Ananias." "Here am I." Do you not think that God speaks to us many times and gets no answer? Happy is he who can say with David, "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face, my heart said unto thee, thy face, Lord, will I seek." Every Sabbath-day you receive a heavenly message, and in your reading of Scripture, and in your private worship voices whisper to you from God, voices which the ear heareth not: does your heart hearken to these calls? When your heart hears a rebuke for a certain omission, do you respond by repairing that omission? Or if it be a rebuke for sin committed, is your heart humbled at once, and ready to respond by putting away the sin? If there be a call to duty, or a secret prompting to sacrifice, does your spirit say at once, "Here am I"? Scarce should we need the Lord to speak; for "as the eyes of a maiden look unto the hand of her mistress," responding to every motion of her hand, so should our heart be immediately answerable to the will of the Lord in all things. O Lord, make us like wax to thy seal! May our heart echo the voice of our heavenly Father.

He was also *ready*. "Here am I," said he. He did not ask, "What for?" but "Here am I," ready for anything. Oh, that our hearts might be in such a state that were it for living or for dying, for giving or for losing, for suffering or for working, the same response would come forth, "Here am I, make what use thou canst of me, my Lord; I shall count it an honour and a joy if thou wilt send me anywhere, to anyone, with any message, at any time: here am I." Oh, brothers and sisters, are we free from reservations? Whatsoever the Lord saith to us, are we prepared to do it? What drawbacks there often are! What hindrances to consecration, what reserves for the flesh; but blessed shall that man be who has no answer to give to God's call but just, "Here am I." Ready, aye ready!

Again, I think his posture was one which I can only describe by using the phrase that he was *all there*. "Ananias." "Here am I," said he. Would not some Christians be compelled to say if they described themselves truthfully, "I am not here—thou callest me but I am not here"? Is it not so, that sometimes in prayer we are not there? In singing the praises of God how often it happens that the mind is wandering,—we are not there. I know there is such a thing as preaching, and teaching, and doing service for God with a portion of yourself, and it is not a fact that all that is within you is stirred up to the service of the Lord. I often see upon a sunny wall a chrysalis, and when I go to take it down, I find that the summer's sun has shone upon it and the insect has developed, and left nothing but an empty case behind. How often in the pew we find the chrysalis of a man, but where is the man himself? Wait till to-morrow morning, and see him in his shop; there is the man; or, to follow up the figure, there is the butterfly with all its wings. Wait till you find our friend engaged in secular employment to his own advantage, and then you will see what he is made of; but in the work of the Lord he is not worth his salt. But oh, brethren, if ever a man ought to be all there, it is when he is called to the service of God. He should marshal all his faculties, and every faculty should reply, "Here am I." Call over the muster-roll of all your powers, and capacities, and abilities, and let each one of them answer to it, "Here am I!" The whole of a

living man is something worth having, but a fragment of a man is only fit to be buried. Oh, that we might be found with our loins girt, and our lamps trimmed, and we ourselves as men that wait for our Lord, and watch for his coming. We are to be ready at his bidding to consecrate every faculty of spirit, soul, and body to the grandest cause that ever moved the soul of man. There is the man, and there is his posture; may we be like him, and stand as he stood! Help us, O Spirit of the living God!

III. Now, thirdly, we are to look to HIS DIRECTION. When he had thus said, "Here am I!" the Lord gave him his orders in detail. I do not say that the Lord will give us orders verbally, as he did to Ananias; and I would have you take heed that you do not mistake whims of your own mind for the voice of God; but I do say that whatsoever your hand findeth to do you are to do it with your might, and believe that God's voice is calling you to that service which his providence places in your way. God still guides his servants when they are willing to be guided. Ananias had his orders as to *where* he should go. The Lord said, "Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas." The Lord knows the street and he knows the house where the sinner lives who is to be blessed by you. The Lord is very specific in his directions; for he gives Ananias the name of the person who kept the house. Whether it was a house of public entertainment or not, I do not know; but the Lord knew all about it, and he gave his messenger precise directions. If you stand waiting for the Lord he will direct you to-day to the right street, and to the right house. Only wait upon him, and if you go in his name he will take care that you are not sent to the wrong person.

His directions further related to the person *to whom* he was to go. This person was to be named Saul, known to come from Tarsus, and he was to be a blind man; for he was to "receive his sight" through this Ananias. The Lord knows the individual whom you are to bless, and all about him; what he is, and where he is, and what he has been doing, and what he is doing, and what he is going to do. Though, as I have already said, you have no verbal directions given to you, yet any person who falls in your way, if you will but seek to do God's work to him, will turn out to be *the* person whom God intends you to bless. You are to deal with him in faith under that impression, and you will not be disappointed.

Ananias was also told *when* to go; he was to arise and go at once. Perhaps he had not yet left his bed, for it was a vision of the night; but he was to "Arise and go." God's errands are so important that we must not delay in their performance. Whenever a man proposes to obey in a week's time, he confesses himself to be disobedient for that time. He who, when he receives a message delivers it at once, with the impression of his call fresh upon him, will deliver it with authority and power. This day there is a call to each believer to tell out the glories of the name of Christ wherever he has opportunity; this let him do at once.

Ananias was also told *why* he was to go; he was to go to Saul of Tarsus; "for behold he prayeth." The servant was to go because the Master was there already. God had inspired the prayer of the blinded persecutor, and now he was about to answer it by Ananias. Where

God has ploughed we are to sow. Of that preparation you know but little, but your own duty is clear enough. If you begin to pick and choose the objects of your labour, you will select the wrong persons; but if because God has put such and such a person in your way, you tell him of Jesus and his love, you will make no mistake. The Lord who prepares you to speak has prepared him to listen. In fact, in this case Paul was so prepared that he had "seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in." If we are always ready for the Master's work, we shall be surprised to find how beautifully he makes us fit in with his providence and his grace. There is a person in this Tabernacle this morning who has been here many times, and has always expected that a Christian friend would speak to him, and yet nobody has done so; but if you do it this morning, he will respond to you, and say, "Thank you; this is what I was looking for. God has been troubling me of late in my thoughts, and I am desirous to find the way of peace; you are the very person whom I wished to see." God sends the right messenger to the right man—Ananias to Saul.

He had further directions; for he was told *what* he was to do when he found Saul; he was to lay his hand on him. There is a great deal in the touch of an earnest man. If you stand half a mile off from a man, and throw the gospel at him, you will miss him; but if you go close to him, and lay hold upon him, giving him a hearty grip of the hand, and show that you have an affection for him, you will, by God's blessing, lead him in the right way. You must come into heart contact if you are to influence the man. "But," say you, "if I did thus grasp a man and speak with him, I could not open his eyes." Could Ananias do so? Yet the Lord worked by Ananias, and why not by you? "Oh, but I do not think I could comfort a troubled heart." Ananias could not have comforted Paul unless the Lord had been with him. Paul was a vastly superior man to Ananias; but yet the humbler man was the means of the spiritual enlightenment of the greater mind; and why should not you? Though you should meet with a great sceptic, or a very learned person who is quite a giant Goliath, compared with you, yet make bold to play the man; for the Lord does not work by gigantic instruments, but by young Davids, who seem unequal to the task. At any rate I do pray you, dear brother, be ready to speak what the Lord has spoken unto your own soul; and be this your resolve,—

> "Now will I tell to sinners round
> What a dear Saviour I have found;
> Point them to thy redeeming blood,
> And say, Behold the way to God."

Your instructions are in the Scriptures; follow them!

IV. But now, fourthly: good Ananias, excellent man as he was, had HIS DIFFICULTIES, and so when he was bidden to go he said, "Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon thy name."

These difficulties were *very natural.* Saul's conversion was astonishing to the last degree. Ananias had long been thinking of the terrible persecutor, Saul,—"I have heard by many of this man." Could it be that

this wolf had become a lamb? Ananias had Saul on the brain through terror of his cruelties, and now he was to have Saul on the heart through joy of his repentance. He had heard such dreadful stories of the ferocious persecutor, that as soon as he heard the word "Saul" it took his breath away. There is a promise that the leopard shall lie down with the kid, but it is not surprising that the kid should at first shrink from the monster; and so this dear, plain, simple-minded man was startled at the idea that he was to visit the malicious man who had sought the lives of Christians.

But, notice, that his objections were such that *he could tell the Lord about them;* and whenever you feel any difficulty, if you can lay it before the Lord in prayer, there may be unbelief in it, but there will be no be wilful sin in it. We do not praise that good man who said, "Send by whomsoever thou wilt send, but not by me." Yet he was not blamed when he gave his reason, and mourned that he was slow of speech; but the Lord met him in great tenderness, and helped his infirmity. To tell your difficulty to God may be an evidence that you are hearty in his service, and only regret that you have not greater ability to consecrate to it.

But, observe, that his difficulty was *unfounded.* If he had thought for a minute he would have concluded that if Saul prayed he must have ceased to persecute. To any man who prays we may go with confidence that he will listen to our witness concerning Christ, in whose name he is praying. This Ananias had forgotten. The Lord had changed the heart of Saul, he had visited him with the light of his glory, and made him his captive for three whole days of darkness, and now he was ready enough to welcome the man by whom his eyes would be opened. Do we not lose opportunities of doing good by dwelling too much upon the past characters of those to whom we are sent? Do we not say, "I have heard of this man that he is a desperate, drunken, swearing fellow: I shall not go near him"? My dear friend, this is the man who most needs your aid; and who knows but at the very time when you go to him the Lord may be dealing with his conscience, so as to set before you an open door. Are we to speak to none but those who will welcome us? In that case we shall be often disappointed, for such persons do not always repay our exertions. Those who have been for a long time very hopeful are usually the most hopeless of cases; but utterly hopeless people are often the most hopeful when we have faith enough to approach them. Do not bury a man before he is dead; hope that so long as a sinner lives he may yet live unto God. Be hopeful that he who placed this sinner in your way and you in the sinner's way, has designs of love which are about to be accomplished.

V. Concerning Ananias, I want to remind you, in the fifth place, of HIS COMFORT in the work. The Lord reassured his servant first by reminding him of *the doctrine of election.* God said to him, "He is a chosen vessel unto me." Some read it "he is a choice vessel," as if there was originally something in Paul which rendered him a choice person; but the apostle himself does not put it so, for he describes Ananias as saying, "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee that thou shouldst know his will." He did not know the will of the Lord except through the divine choice. To him the revelation of God came as the

gift of sovereign grace. Here was one whom God had chosen to bless, though Ananias knew it not. The grand doctrines of sovereign grace and of electing love are the most powerful inducements to labour for the conversion of all who come in our way. Did not our Lord say to one of his servants, "I have much people in this city," and did he not make this his encouragement for preaching the truth with all boldness? So let it be your encouragement. Behind all opposition there is an almighty will which cannot be set aside; there is a purpose which must be accomplished; there is a predestination that can by no means be defeated. "Oh," saith one, "if I believed that God had an elect people I should not preach again." It is singular how people argue, for that is the very reason why I do preach. If the Lord has not chosen any, what is the use of my preaching? But if he has done so, I shall not preach in vain. Often have I thought to myself,—I shall have a picked congregation to-day, God will bring the very people here that he means to bless, and he will save his own elect by his own word. It does not rest with me, nor with them, but with him, and therefore there is hope. The eternal purpose goeth forth in all the majesty of its might, therefore will we go to every creature, testifying in the name of Jesus, and believing that as many as the Father giveth him shall come to him.

Moreover, the Lord put aside the fears of Ananias by telling him that he had *chosen this man to a great purpose.* "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name among the gentiles." A great sinner is to be made a great saint. A great opposer is to become a great labourer. Who knows how largely God may use the sinner whom we seek to save? Who knows what may be in any man, or in any child? You, dear teachers in the school, may be teaching Luthers, or Melancthons; you may be instructing in those young girls holy women, who shall serve the Lord abundantly. You are handling choice materials, therefore be not careless in your service. To you is given not gold, nor silver, nor precious stones, to fashion, but immortal spirits, that shall glorify Christ on earth and in heaven.

And then, to remove all difficulty from the mind of Ananias, the Lord told him that *he would go with him,*—"For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." You are bidden to teach the gospel to an individual who has been very hardened, and you fear that you have no strength for such an undertaking; and, therefore, you cry, "Lord, I cannot show this man the truth." The Lord replies, "I will show him." "But," say you, "he is so ignorant!" "I will show him." "Alas, he is blind and prejudiced!" "I will show him." Ye are "labourers together with God." When we lift our trowel upon this wall we may know that a divine arm is moving at the same moment; and the stone which we seek to place in its course shall be laid there by an omnipotent hand, which worketh effectually. Wherefore, give yourselves up to your Lord's work, whatever that work may be. "Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff. Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them; and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord, and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel."

VI. I must ask your attention for a minute or two to the sixth point, and that is, the difficulties of Ananias being taken away; observe HIS OBEDIENCE to his Master's orders.

It was *prompt* obedience: "Ananias went his way and entered into the house." No longer hesitating nor delaying, he went his way with all speed. His obedience was *exact:* he entered into the house, and, putting his hands on him, said, "Brother Saul." He did as he had been bidden. There is a great point in that. Mind that what you preach is the gospel of the Lord Jesus, and that what you do is by order from the throne, and that it is carried out in the Spirit's power, for you cannot expect the Lord to bless your message if you alter it. If my servant goes to the door and amends the message which I have sent by him, why then he must bear the responsibility of doing so and also run the risk of dismissal; but if I as Christ's servant deliver my Lord's message to the best of my knowledge, just as he gave it to me, then my Lord is responsible for the success of it, and not myself. Be prompt, therefore, and be exact.

Then, see how *loving* he was. "Brother Saul," he said. Saul of Tarsus would not have made two bites of Ananias a little time before if he had fallen into his power; but now the words "Brother Saul" are sweet to his ear. Love is the method of grace. You cannot win souls by putting on a morose countenance and repelling all approaches; but it must be "Brother Saul." Do not be afraid to call the individual "Brother"; but take care that you mean it. Though he may be a greater and wiser man than yourself, still come close to him with confident affection; for if he be indeed a brother, he will accept the salutation, and, if not, your peace will return again to you. Ananias did not use the term as a cant expression, but his spirit and feeling were brotherly. The love of his speech bewrayed his deep affection and intense sympathy. He was as pleased with Saul as a mother with a newborn child. He shared with angels the joy over the returning prodigal.

See also how *wisely* he spake. It was given him in the same hour what he should speak. He did not pompously say, "I am an ordained official, and therefore speak with great dignity"; but he began, "The Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me." It was wise thus to sink himself in his authority. He speaks most wisely all through, and speaks precisely the right words. When he alludes to Paul's former course, he only gives a hint of it, —"the Lord that appeared to thee in the way as thou camest." He does not say, "as thou camest to persecute us," but he allowed conscience to do its own work. He gives the items of his errand,—"Jesus hath sent me that thou mightest receive thy sight and be filled with the Holy Ghost." I have not time to indicate all the points which show the prudence of the Lord's messenger. May we also be made wise to win souls.

Notice how thoroughly *faithful* Ananias was. He said, "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." The tendency with many good evangelists is to say nothing upon that point. The main thing is to get this man to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, but to say, "Arise, and be baptized," is not that far less important? Brethren, we have

nothing to do with altering Christ's message; but are bound to deliver it as a whole, without addition or diminution. The tendency everywhere is to say, "Baptism should not be mentioned; it is sectarian." Who said so? If our Lord commanded it, who dares to call it sectarian? We are not commanded to preach a part of the gospel, but the whole of the gospel; and this Ananias did. Is it not written, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved"? Why omit one clause? I question whether God's blessing has not been withheld from some teachers and preachers because they have failed to repeat their message in its entirety. A brother will write to me next week and say, "I am sorry that I cannot circulate your sermon, because you allude to baptism." My dear brother, if you cannot circulate the sermon, I must be content without your kind help; but I cannot amend the Lord's word to please the best man upon the earth. What prominence is given to baptism here! We should greatly err if we believed in baptismal regeneration, or even in the efficacy of washing in water for the removal of sin; but, on the other hand, we are not to place in the background an ordinance which, by the language of Scripture, is placed in the forefront. Ananias said to Paul, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins." And this tallies with that other text, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." In both of these passages the Lord puts a special honour upon baptism, and it would be ill for us to neglect that which he so evidently esteems. Do not make any mistake, and imagine that immersion in water can wash away sin; but do remember that if the Lord puts this outward profession side by side with the washing away of sins it is not a trifling matter. Remember that other text, "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Faith must be followed by obedience, or it cannot be sincere: do, then, what Jesus bids you. That is not, however, my point. I want to urge upon you that you should always speak the Lord's word faithfully, and be true to that which the Lord reveals to you, even to the jots and tittles. In these days there is much talk about "undenominationalism," and in that talk there is much to be admired; but the danger is lest we should on all hands begin to pare away a little from the word of God for the sake of an imaginary unity. The suggestion is that one is to give up this, and another is to give up that; but I say to you—give up nothing which your Lord commands. In all charity believe that your brother desires to hold only Christ's truth; but do you make sure that you hold it yourself, whether he holds it or not. This is the best undenominationalism in the world: every man to be faithful to his convictions, and true to his Master out and out, and then to give his brother in Christ credit for doing the same. In this way we may expect the Master's blessing.

VII. For, lastly, observe the RESULT of what Ananias said. The results were IMMEDIATE; for Paul received his sight at once, and was comforted at once, and baptized at once. But the results were most *extensive;* for this Paul became a preacher of the gospel to every land; as the apostle of the Gentiles he brought multitudes to Jesus. It was a splendid work that Ananias did that morning; for to this day the testimony of Paul to the cross of Christ is ringing over Europe, and throughout the whole world. Where would we have been as a nation

if it had not been for the apostle of the Gentiles? Our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to raise up in Paul a specially useful instrument of blessing to the sons of men. I might almost say, among those that are born of woman there has not been a greater than the Apostle Paul. It was needful that Ananias should link him on to the church of God by instructing him in the faith, and initiating him by baptism. Go ye, then, my brethren and sisters, wherever God sends you; for you know not what may be within a man, a woman, or a child whom you shall bring to Jesus. Everybody is not a Paul, but yet you may find a Paul among your converts. The pearl fisher standing on the rock plunges deep into the sea; he does not know whether or no he shall bring up a pearl that will decorate an emperor's diadem, but he searches the deeps in that hope; and why should not he bring up such a treasure as well as anybody else? No matter though the fisherman himself may be coarse, and ragged, and rugged, yet he may light upon a priceless pearl. And you, whoever you may be, I charge you, in the name of the eternal God, plunge yourself into your work with whole-hearted devotion, and you shall yet discover some hidden jewel which shall adorn Immanuel's diadem. So may it be with you, dear friends, for Christ's sake Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Acts ix. 1—21; Acts xxii. 1—16.

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DELIGHT IN THE ALMIGHTY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 3RD, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God."—Job xxii. 26.

THE Lord said to Eliphaz and his friends, "Ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath"; and therefore we must always regard what they said with careful discrimination. They were wise men according to their light, but they were quite at sea in their judgment of Job. However, in this particular verse Eliphaz declared that which is taught in many other parts of Holy Scripture, and we may profit by his utterance. God grant that by his Spirit we may fully experience the joys described in the words before us.

Eliphaz and his friends had judged Job from their own point of view, making their own experience to be the standard. They themselves, had prospered, and therefore they inferred that if a man served God he must necessarily prosper in worldly things; and that if he did not succeed as they had done, he must have been guilty of great crimes. Though they could not discover any actual fault in Job, they concluded without further evidence that he must have been a hypocrite, and have acted oppressively to his servants, or have been unmindful of the claims of the poor, or in some other way have brought upon himself the wrath of God. It never entered their mind that so terrible a sickness and such a list of dreadful calamities could have befallen any man except as a punishment for special sin. They inferred virtue from prosperity, and sin from adversity. Unrighteous and cruel logic! At once false and brutal! It renders men at once false witnesses and Pharisees; condemning the innocent because of their sorrows, and flattering themselves because of their ease. To judge according to outward circumstances has been the tendency of men in all times; even David could not understand how it was that the wicked were so free from troubles, while all the day long he was himself plagued, and chastened every morning. A right principle lay at the bottom of this wonder; for, indeed, the Lord will reward the good and will punish the wicked; but a great mistake is made when we suppose that this life is the time for meting out rewards and punishments. God will, un-

doubtedly, when the time shall have fully come, discharge the full vials of his wrath upon the ungodly, but the present is a period of long-suffering, wherein the wicked spread themselves like a green bay tree. Except God's mercy shall lead them to repentance, they are in the same wretched condition as bullocks which are being fattened for the slaughter. Who envies them? The ungodly have their portion in this life; they increase in riches; their eyes stand out with fatness, they have more than heart can wish. As for the children of God, it often happeneth that gall and wormwood are mingled with their drink: waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. We must not judge according to the sight of the eyes, or according to present conditions, or we shall make gross mistakes. The richest may be the most wicked, and the poorest may be the most gracious; those who suffer least may deserve to suffer most, and those who are most afflicted in this life may have the highest glory in the life to come.

I suspect that Eliphaz and his friends had enjoyed smooth sailing. How should they judge the man who had done business amid tempests? Their mental life was not disturbed by great conflicts; they had not gone deeply into things, nor searched to the bottom of spiritual matters; they had no knowledge of their own hidden corruptions, and had endured but little of the rod of chastisement, and, consequently, they had been at ease. Their mistake was that they sat in judgment upon another who was more tried than themselves, and condemned him for being in sore distress. Their own serenity led them to judge the troubled one very harshly. This ought not to be. If any of us are inclined thus to judge and condemn, it is time that we put this mischievous spirit far from us. If we judge others, others will judge us. Two can always play at that evil game. I remember a company of terribly despondent believers who were for years a severe scourge to their happier brethren. Having a deep sense of their inward corruptions, being sorely tempted of the devil, and having only a weak and trembling faith, they tyrannized over others who were more happy than themselves. They judged that those who were not as much tempted as themselves did not exhibit the spot of God's children. None were more bitter than these humble people in denouncing those who had not been as much humbled as themselves. Those who did not sit in the dust, and groan to the same tunes as themselves, they judged to be very dubious Christians, and took care to scald them with that kind of hot pity which is not much different from contempt. This was as wrong as wrong can be. It is not to be endured that the sick should make themselves the standard of health, that dwarfs should set up to be the models of manhood. These worthy people set up a standard marked in very black ink, and those who did not come up to so much grief and so much unbelief, they set aside as very questionable members of the divine family. This is manifestly vicious; but it is equally evil when judgments are pronounced from the other side. For persons in good health, whose livers act well, who have abundance of this world's good, and very little care and trial, who have not often had to stand by the grave and weep because the arrows of death have struck their dearest ones, who have never known what it is to be wounded in spirit,—for these to set up their standard and condemn the weak and the sad, is

a crime against the Lord. To say,—If you do not believe as firmly as we do, if you do not rejoice as we do, if you are not as sensible of sanctification as we are, you are not in Christ at all, is a piece of arrogance very grievous to the Spirit of the Lord. Oh, my strong brother, listen to one who knows by experience the heaviness of a child of sorrow. Who made thee a ruler in Israel? God's children always play the fool when they play the judge; they are never in order when they act as if they were the head of the family of grace. The Father knows all his children. All who observe carefully will also know that while some are strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, others are weak in faith and mere babes in grace. These little ones are not one jot the less precious in the sight of the great Father than the more fully grown ones. Let none of the strong cattle push the weak cattle with horn and with shoulder; for when the weak ones complain unto God he will regard them, and will avenge them upon the proud. If thou be strong, God keep thee so, and make thee stronger; but use not thy strength for treading down the weak. If thou be weak, the Lord strengthen thee, and deliver thee from this malady; but do not envy the strong, and begin to speak lightly of those who excel thee. The more of light, the more of joy, the more of holy confidence, the more of faith, the more glory to God: therefore covet these things earnestly as among the best gifts. May the Holy Ghost help us to attain to the highest degree of grace; but may he ever prevent us from judging our brethren. Here was the fault of Eliphaz. He was right in many of his statements, but he was wrong in his ungenerous application of them to holy Job.

I want this morning, as God shall help me, to lead you up to the pastures on the hill tops. I pray that I may help you to a higher and joyful experience in the things of God, whilst I shall speak, first, of *a desired position* towards God,—"Then shalt thou have thy delight in the Almighty, and shalt lift up thy face unto God"; and, secondly upon the question—*when can this happy experience be realized?* "Then," says the text, and, therefore, there is such a time when we can have delight in the Almighty and lift up our face unto God.

I. First, here is A DESIRED POSITION TOWARDS GOD.

Many men forget God: he is no object of delight to them, for they ignore his existence, and they would even think it a great relief if it could be proved that there were no God,—no God to observe them, no God to record their misdeeds, no God to call them to judgment, no God to punish them for their iniquities. Let us pity the multitudes who claim to be happy without God; for it is the last extreme of depravity when, blotting out God from his soul, a man obtains a wretched comfort as the consequence of his folly. To be without God is to be without rest in the present and without hope for the future.

Great numbers of men go a stage further: they believe in God, they cannot doubt that there is a Most High God who judgeth the children of men; but their only thought towards him is that of dread and dislike. They do not want to hear of him: if the things of God are forced upon their attention they are soon weary of such distasteful themes, for they only look upon God as a just and terrible Judge, who will certainly punish them for their transgressions. It is woe to them even to think of the

great God. Though this dread of God and this neglect of God cannot deliver them out of his hands, yet they find a kind of comfort in it. As we are told of the ostrich—I know not whether it be true or not—that when it cannot escape the hunter it buries its head in the sand so as not to see its pursuer; so these foolish persons blind their own eyes, and thus produce a foolish security of heart. They think of God with dread, dismay, despondency, and despair. I am grieved to add that this principle even tinctures the thoughts of true friends of God: for when they bow before God it is not only with the reverence of a loving child, but with the terror of a slave; they are afraid of him who should be their exceeding joy. Their view of God is incorrect, for it is not such as the Spirit of adoption would give them. They are really trusting in him and in the great propitiation which he has set forth, but they have not come to know him under that blessed term which our Saviour puts into our mouth when he bids us say, "Our Father, which art in heaven." Such trembling ones are still under the spirit of bondage, which causes them to fear, as condemned persons dread the executioner. They stand like Israel trembling at the foot of Sinai; they have not come unto Mount Zion and to the blood of sprinkling, which speaketh better things than that of Abel. God is still to them exceeding terrible, so that they fear and quake. Even though they are his children, they are not able to lift up their faces unto their own Father. They haunt the outer courts of the sanctuary, but into the most holy place they do not dare to enter: they see the smoke of the burnt-offering, but they have not learned to feed upon it, and so to have happy communion with God. These people may be safe, but they are not happy: they may be saved from sin, but not from sorrow. Faith, if it were stronger, would effectually slay and bury servile fear.

Let us meditate a while upon what is here meant by *delighting in the Almighty.* The man who experiences this delight is glad *that there is a God.* That atheistic philosophy which makes the whole world to be a chance production which grew of itself, or developed itself by some innate force, is a very dreary piece of fiction to the man who delights himself in the Almighty. I tremble at any teaching, religious or scientific, which seems to place God further off than we have believed him to be. To draw him nearer to me, and myself nearer to him, is the innermost longing of my soul. Do you not feel the same? I know you do if you have a child-like spirit towards him. We delight to see God in the shadow of every passing cloud, in the colouring of every opening flower, in the glitter of every dewdrop, in the twinkling of every star. The Lord is personally at work in all the processes of nature, and natural laws are simply the Lord's usual method of operation. Our God is so near us that in him we live, and move, and have our being. At this spring tide, in the fragrance of the flowers and the song of birds, we perceive God everywhere present, renewing the face of the year. Beloved, the thought of God is to the souls of those who know and love him the most delightful that can cross the mind. To put God away from us is injury to our happiness, as well as treason to our duty; but to get nearer and clearer views of his omnipresence, his omniscience, his omnipotence, is to increase the joy of our heart.

To go a step further, the delight of the believer in his God is a

delight in God *as he really is;* for there are in the world many false gods of men's own manufacture. Remember that your own thoughts of what God is are far from being correct unless they are drawn from his own revelation. This sacred book is infallible, but not our thoughts; and wherein we differ from God as he has revealed himself we differ from the truth. It is as easy to make an idol out of your own thought as it is for the Hindoo to make a god of the mud of the Ganges. There is but one God revealed in Holy Scripture, and in nature, and in providence: his name is Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, who has still further declared himself as the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He is God in undivided unity of essence, in the trinity of his persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. With all our souls we worship and adore him. Just as God appears in Holy Scripture we are to delight in him; regarding him as love, as mercy, as long-suffering, as justice, as power, as purity, as all goodness and greatness in one. The characteristic which seems to cause most delight to perfect saints in heaven is not love alone, nor mercy alone, but that which comprehends grace and mercy, and much more; I mean holiness. This is the perpetual cry of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth." The holiness of God, or, if you will, the wholeness of God, the completeness of God, the perfection of God, is the delight of all believers. We would not tone down a single attribute, we would not disturb the equilibrium of the divine perfections; but we delight in God in all those aspects of his character which are mentioned in his Holy Word.

Further, he that delights in God delights not only in God as he is, but *in all that God does*, and this is a higher attainment than some have reached. "It is the Lord," said one of old, "let him do what seemeth him good." Too many would call God to their bar, and hold a trial upon what he does with men in this life, and with the wicked in the world to come. Far other was the spirit of the apostle when he said, "Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?" Concerning any event we simply ask,—Has God done it? Then we bow before his decree, and say no more; for what he has done must be right and wise. When the Lord afflicts us, and hides the reason from our eyes, let us not contend with him; but if we cannot go further, let us be silent before him; even as was the afflicted man of God of whom we read, "Aaron held his peace." Better still will it be if we can complete our confidence, and say with Job, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, and blessed be the name of the Lord." He that delighteth in the Almighty will delight in him even though he smart beneath his hand, and will bless him even when his dispensations are killing ones: as said the patriarch of Uz, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Practically put, this delight in the Almighty *shows itself in the Christian when nothing else remains to him.* If he be stripped of everything, he cries, "The Lord is my portion." When the cupboard is bare, and the garments are worn out, and poverty stares the man in the face, he says, "My God is such a satisfactory and all-sufficient portion that I am rich and increased in goods while possessing nothing but my God." The same is true when such a man is surrounded with

every earthly comfort, for he still feels, "The Lord is my portion." The saint begs vehemently of his God that he may not have his portion in this life. If God were to multiply his stores beyond his power to count them, he would be dissatisfied unless in all these he saw his Father's covenant love. One saint, who suddenly became poor, was still as happy as ever, for he said, "When I had abundance, I saw God in all things, and now that I have lost my property I see all things in God." These are equally blessed states of mind. It were well to combine them, and see God in all things, and all things in God, at the same time! So it should be with the believer. "Why," saith he, "these earthly comforts never were my delights; these were not my daily manna, but only little staybyes for the time; sips of sweetness while I pass through the barren wilderness." The Lord was and is my chief portion, my well of comfort, the rock of my salvation. If we make props of our outward joys, we shall fall when they are taken away; but if we rest wholly upon the foundation of divine love, altogether apart from external things, we shall never be moved. Happy is the Christian who can practically enjoy delight in the Almighty by making him to be his all in all, all the day, and every day.

You will see this delight in God exhibiting itself in frequent meditations upon God. Such a man has pleasure in being alone with God, and his sweetest occupation is meditation upon the years of the right hand of the Most High. He finds in holy contemplation pastures large and green, in which his soul doth feed and lie down.

> "My God, thou art mine, what a comfort divine!
> What a blessing to know my Jesus is mine."

These happy meditations very soon show themselves in words. The man that delights in the Almighty delights to speak about him. That which is in the well will before long come up in the bucket, and that which is in the heart will soon display itself in the tongue. Is there any conversation more elevating, more consoling, more strengthening, than conversation about the Lord our God? And when you go home from such society do you not feel it sweet to fall asleep with the savour of it upon your lips? Is not holy converse infinitely better than all the mirth and merriment of the world's amusements? Here is something to feed upon, something solid, something real; saints delight to contribute to such conversation and to receive instruction from it.

"Delight thyself in the Lord." This will give you pleasure in the midst of pain. Do you know what it is to have many aches, and sufferings, and, perhaps, a throbbing head, and yet to feel that you have another self which has no pains, because it dwells in God, where all is calm and quiet? You felt that it would be a great mercy to be released from this painful life; and yet you have not raised the question with your God, but have waited his good pleasure. Faith has made you feel, "Wherever I am, whatever I feel, so long as God is near me, and his sweet love fills my bosom, I will greatly rejoice and triumph in the God of my salvation."

This will show itself in your life, for it will be a pleasure to do anything to exalt the name of God. It will gild your ordinary conversation with heavenly splendour, if in it you adorn the doctrine of God

your Saviour in all things. You will march to heaven beneath the spell of celestial music, and the bliss of the glorified will stimulate your spirits, when you can feel that all is for God, and that God is all in all to you. This is to delight yourself in the Almighty. God give us to get into that state, and to keep there till we leap to heaven, and are in that state.

I call your attention to the special name by which Eliphaz describes the ever-blessed God: he says, "Delight thyself in *the Almighty*." Is it not singular that he should choose a term descriptive of omnipotence as the paramount cause of the believer's delight? God is love, and I can readily understand how one might delight himself in God under that aspect; but the believer is taught to delight himself in God as strong and mighty. What a mercy it is that there is a power that makes for righteousness!—that at the back of all these wars and confusions, and behind all sin and false doctrine, there is an infinitely powerful God! During the last few weeks you have felt an intense joy in the omnipotence of God. You have whispered to your forebodings,—"It is all right. The Almighty is not paralyzed, his arm is not shortened: the Lord reigneth." Brethren, the pendulum swings to and fro, advancing and retreating, but yet there is a real progress made: you cannot see it by watching the pendulum, but up higher on the face of the clock there is evidence of an onward march, and of a coming hour. The kingdom of God is coming; righteousness shall prevail. Delight also in the fact that Jehovah is almighty in mercy—mighty to save. He can forgive the greatest sin; he can change the hardest heart; he can help us to fight out unto victory the sternest of our battles against unrighteousness; he is stronger than sin and Satan; for all power dwells with him. When you look at this phase of it, and think of his dear Son exalted on high to give repentance and remission of sins, you may indeed delight in the Almighty Redeemer, as "able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him." Surely, when you see omnipotence linked with righteousness and mercy, you will delight yourself in the Almighty.

Think also of the Lord's almightiness in the matter of the keeping, preserving, defending, and perfecting of all his people. The sheep of his pasture shall not perish; for the good Shepherd is omnipotent to smite the roaring lion who would devour them. None that trust in him shall ever be ashamed or confounded, world without end. All the elect are well secured within the fold of Jesus, neither shall any pluck them out of his hand. Delight yourselves in the Almighty; for all the power of God is enlisted on the side of the believer. To me, I confess, it is an intense joy that he is almighty to carry out every one of his eternal purposes. Jesus shall not fail nor be discouraged. That which Jehovah hath willed shall be; in the unfolding of the great roll of history it shall be found that it tallies exactly with the divine purposes and immutable decrees. He that sitteth on the flood reigneth King for ever and ever. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Let our hearts delight that the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth already, and let us pray that in yet a further sense his kingdom may come, as come it will. Let us delight ourselves in the Almighty, linking that word to every other attribute, and rejoicing that he has almighty love, omnipotent grace. Again let us say "Hallelujah!"

Now, let us turn with intense satisfaction to the other expression used by Eliphaz: "*Thou shalt lift up thy face unto God.*" What does it mean? Does it not mean, first, joy in God? When a man hangs his head down he is unhappy: it is the attitude of misery; but oh, when our thoughts of God are changed, and our relationship to God is different, we lift up our faces and sun our countenances in the light of God's favour. The face of God in his Anointed is toward the believer, and therefore the believer's face is toward the Most High. He hath said, "Seek ye my face," and how can we seek his face but with our own faces? "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," is the divine call; and the believer looks to God with intense joy, knowing that in him is his salvation.

Does it not signify, also, that this man is reconciled to God, and clear before him? How can he look up who is guilty? Guilt makes a man hang his head. "Conscience doth make cowards of us all"; but oh, my brothers, when the atoning sacrifice has come with all its power to us, when we are washed in the blood of the Lamb, and we are clean every whit, then we lift up our face unto God. In that tremendous day when heaven and earth shall flee before the face of the Judge, we shall be bravely calm, fearing no word of doom, because we are cleansed by the atoning sacrifice, and justified by the righteousness in which we put our trust. What a blessed thing to lift up one's face unto God in confidence towards him through Christ Jesus!

Does not our text indicate fearlessness? Fear covers her face, and would fain hide herself altogether, even though to accomplish concealment the rocks must fall upon her. That sacred bravery which the Holy Spirit breathes into the child of God makes him cry, "Abba, Father," and, in the spirit of adoption he lifts up his face unto God.

May it not also signify expectation? "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help." "My expectation is from him," says David. Oh, to lift one's face toward God, looking for deliverance, safety, and rest, and expecting both grace and glory from his right hand!

Brethren, I am talking very simply of things well known to me, and yet I cannot convey to you a sense of the joy of a face uplifted unto God. You must feel it for yourselves, by lifting up your own faces. Some of you poor creatures cannot lift up your faces unto God by reason of despondency; but we pray that you may yet do so. If you have ever looked unto the Lord through the glass of the atonement you will then be able to lift up your faces towards him with a calm delight. As for you who are God's own people, and yet go through the world in bondage, I charge you, cry unto the Lord to change your condition, and fill you with his joy, for then your faces will shine in the light of his face.

I am sure that he who has this delight in God, and this lifting up of the face towards God, is a man that has wonderful peace with regard to the past: the past is forgiven, its iniquity covered, for the Lord has looked in love upon him. The man who walks in happy communion with God has a wonderful peace with regard to the present. Is it well with thee? "Exceedingly well. God loves me, and I love him; I am brought into fellowship with him by Christ Jesus my Lord, and we are friends, with a friendship which is secured by mutual delight and sealed by covenant

engagements, so that it can never cease to be." Such a man has peace with regard to the future. He has no fear of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He is not afraid of coming dangers in life, nor of the pangs of death, nor the terrors of judgment. When you delight in the Lord, nothing can disturb the unbroken current of your joy? The sublime serenity of the heavens which arch above your head enters into your own spirit when the Lord who made the heavens dwells in your heart. Strive after this sacred peace: delight in the Almighty, and lift up your faces unto God.

II. I must close by noticing our second point, and that is, WHEN CAN WE REALIZE THIS? I have not confidence enough in Eliphaz to make his answer to the question the only one that I shall give you: I must give you something fuller and better than was known to him.

First, a man can realize all this *when he knows that he is reconciled to God.* What is God's way of effecting reconciliation between a sinner and himself? Every sinner is under the curse of the broken law; for it is written, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." No one of us has continued in the perfect observance of the whole law, and therefore God's righteous verdict is against us. The only way of escape from the curse is through the glorious Son of God, who took our nature, and was made a curse for us, as it is written, "Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." He stood in our room and stead, bore the punishment due to our guilt, and thus became a curse on our behalf. All the sacrifices of the Jews were types of this: they were fingers of light pointing to the one all-sufficient sacrifice. That sacrifice the Lord has accepted for men, and he has set forth the Lord Jesus to be the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world; so that whosoever believeth in Jesus Christ, God's appointed sacrifice, is set free from sin, and being set free from sin he can then delight in the Almighty, and lift up his face unto God.

Yet even this could not effect our delight in God unless there was something else; so there must be, in the next place, *a renewed nature.* Our old nature will never delight in God. The carnal mind is enmity against God, it is not reconciled to God, neither indeed can be; it is an alien from the life of God, and an alien it will always be. So, then, ye must be born again: but when a man is born again of the Spirit of God, and receives a new nature, that new nature delights in the Almighty. There is an old nature in us which fights against God still; but the new nature, which is of divine origin, cries after God as a child after its mother; it lives in God as fish live in the sea; God is its element, its life, its all-in-all. So, beloved, if you have been both reconciled and renewed; if you have felt the power of the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Ghost begetting in you a new nature, then you can delight yourselves in God.

In addition to this, you will delight in God much more fully when *the Spirit beareth witness with your spirit* that you are born of God. The spirit of sonship is the spirit of delight in God. What son is afraid to behold his father's face? A loving child suns himself in his father's smile. How have I seen little children clambering up their father's knees, and looking into his face, and saying, "What a dear face it is!"

This is a faint picture of our joy in God through Jesus Christ, by whom also we have received the atonement. What would some of you give to see the dear face of that dear father who was taken from you years ago! I can understand Cowper saying of his mother's picture,

"Oh, that those lips had language!"

Oh, that our departed ones could speak to us again; but our heavenly Father ever lives; and never let it be said that we dare not lift up our faces unto him. We look up, and say in our darkest moments,

"For yet I know I shall Him praise,
Who graciously to me,
The health is of my countenance,
Yea, mine own God is He."

I cannot tell you the inexpressible sweetness of that last line to my soul. Thousands of times it has fallen from my lips. If I have nothing else I have a God, and my soul lays hold on him as Jacob grasped the angel. I will not let him go. Whether he bless me or do not bless me, still will I cling to him with desperate resolve, and cry, "my Lord and my God." This God is our God for ever and ever, he shall be our guide even unto death.

To come to Eliphaz, and to conclude with him. We shall delight ourselves in God, and lift up our face when we do as Eliphaz here tells us. First, *when we live in communion with him.* "Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." If we do not know God how can we delight in him? What delight can there be in an unknown God? Brothers, you are not half as happy as you might be, because you do not study this Book, wherein, as in a glass, you may see the face of Jehovah your God. Oh, that you knew more of his dear Son, for he that hath seen him hath seen the Father! Take God for thy daily company. "Acquaint now thyself with him." Great as he is, dare to be free with him. Though thou be but dust and ashes, yet, like Abraham, speak with him as a man speaketh with his friend, for as thou knowest thy God so shalt thou delight in him, and lift up thy face unto him.

Then, further, we must, if we are to know this delight, *lay up God's words in our hearts*—(verse 22). "Receive, I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thine heart." Your neglected Bibles hide your God. When dust falls on the Scriptures dust falls on the eyes of those who have neglected them, and then they cannot behold the glory of the Lord God. The more of Scripture understood, fed upon, and received into the inward parts, the more will be your delight in God. You can have no pleasure in the speaker if you despise the word spoken: let it be to you as marrow and fatness.

There must be added to this delight in the word *a constant cleansing of the way.* "If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles." God cannot manifest himself to us if we continue in sin. If you professing Christian people are as greedy and hard as other people in your dealings with the world, and if in your families you are as quarrelsome and untruthful as the ungodly, God cannot come to your tabernacles. There must be

purification of life, or there cannot be fellowship with the Lord. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"; impurity of heart will cause blindness of the eyes as to spiritual things. Careful walking will bring joyful walking; but if you lose your purity you will lose your peace. If you are a child of God you cannot sin without feeling the rod: you must obey the Lord in order to enjoy the Lord. Walk in the footsteps of Christ, who did always the things which pleased the Father, and you will receive the joyful witness—"This is my beloved son!" Put away sin wherever you perceive it, and ask for grace to be helped to detect it in all its lurking places. Seek out the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold which Achan has hidden, for else the Lord cannot abide with you. Get rid of your idols.

"So shall your walk be close with God,
Calm and serene your frame;
So purer light shall mark the road
That leads you to the Lamb."

In addition to this, there must be *a constant trust.* "Yea, the Almighty shall be thy defence, and thou shalt have plenty of silver." (See verse 25.) He who does not trust God cannot delight in him. You cannot lift up your face to him while you think him untrue. A childlike confidence is essential to a holy joy. Let us throw ourselves upon God, as a swimmer casts himself upon the water, that it may bear him up; let us trust in God as a child trusts its mother, without the shadow of a question. We sometimes know a great deal too much of what we ought not to know. I see some of God's children very anxious to feed upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; but as for me, I am content with the tree of life. The old serpent still persuades men to pluck forbidden fruit from that evil tree. I know children of God who hold their hands to their heads and cry, "Would God we had never read that sceptical book, and never learned how to distrust the Lord!" Let the time past suffice for the feeding of doubt. Let us eat no more carrion, but feed upon the salted meat of the Word. Let us quit the garlick of Egypt, and feed on the manna of heaven. We do not want to know what the world believes or does not believe, for the world lieth in the wicked one. We do not care what may be the spirit of the age, for the spirit of the world in all ages is the Prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Be it yours and mine to come to Christ, to live on him, and to believe on him with unstaggering faith; so shall we delight ourselves in God, and lift up our faces to him.

Lastly, let us abide in *continual prayer.* Verse 27: "Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows." Want of prayer is a great want indeed; slackness at the mercy-seat will soon take away the spring and elasticity of our spiritual walk. If we are to have a closer walk with God, we must have closer communion with God in supplication.

Now, dear children of God, I have set all this before you, but what power can be in my word unless the Holy Ghost blesses it? I have watered this sermon with strong desires for the spiritual benefit of you all, and now I am mourning over the many who do not know anything

at all about it. They are still devoid of the knowledge of God, and of all desire for him. I am very, very sorry for you. My heart pities you. We have heard of "the Bitter Cry" from the slums of London, and a bitter cry it well may be; but there is a poverty, compared with which mere want of bread is riches; there is a degradation, compared with which the low estate of the pauper is nobility itself. To live without your God—how terrible a death! You know not what joy means; you have not begun to spell the word "delight" until you have begun with God. True joy comes only from a true knowledge of the true God. Oh, sirs, if I had to die like a dog, I should wish to be a Christian, for the sake of the bird in the hand of present delight! If there were no hereafter, the immediate peace and joy of trusting my God are an overflowing reward. But there is a hereafter, and what will you ungodly ones do when that hereafter dawns upon you? You have done without God all your days, and God will do without you to all eternity. What terror lies in that fact! He will say, "Depart!" because you always did depart; he will decree your continuance in the path which you chose, and bid you keep on going away from him for ever. He will say, "He that is filthy, let him be filthy still," and what more dreadful doom can fall upon any one of you? O! ye immortal spirits, ye need an immortal God! O! ye, that cannot cease to be, ye need the Highest of all Beings in whom you may hide yourselves from ceaseless anguish. Trust in God, and then shall you be filled with infinite felicities, but not till then. God bring you to himself, that he may bring you to delight! May the uplifted Saviour draw you and uplift you! May you begin the life of heaven by an immediate delight in the Almighty, and from that delight may you never cease! To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SCRIPTURES READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalms lxii. and lxiii.

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THE BOND OF THE COVENANT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 10TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there will I plead with you face to face. Like as I pleaded with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I plead with you, saith the Lord God. And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant: And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the Lord."—Ezekiel xx., 34—38.

THIS striking utterance was given forth by that renowned seer Ezekiel, at the time when the Israelites, scattered in every country, had begun to forget their nationality. They judged it prudent and wise as much as possible to disguise their distinctive character, and melt their race into the Babylonian or Chaldean, and become like the heathen. Now, God, who chose his people of old, would not have it so, and he interposed with this striking passage,—"And that which cometh into your mind shall not be at all, that ye say, we will be as the heathen, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone." The Lord tells them that he had them for a people, and he meant to hold them for a people. Whether they delighted in it or not, he would not let them go. He pronounced a solemn oath concerning them,—"As I live, saith the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, will I rule over you." They shall no more become Babylonians than of old he would suffer them to become Egyptians.

This passage which I have taken for a text may very truthfully be regarded as a threatening of terrible judgment upon erring Israel; as much as if the Lord had said, "You of the house of Israel, whom I have made to be the type of my spiritual people, you shall be mine; and if you wander from me, I will distinguish you by special punishments; therefore I now threaten you with special judgments. If you will attempt to mix yourselves up with the Gentiles, I will deal with you with a startling severity, such as I have never shown unto the heathen. Your sins are greater, and your privileges greater, and so shall your chastisements be greater. You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." Dear friends,

it is a dreadful thing to profess to belong to the people of God: it is a matter of great privilege if it is true, but if it is a lie it is an awful thing, involving sevenfold judgment. God will cause his professing people to be distinguished from other men, and they that come in among them, who are not truly of them, shall be so dealt with that both the ears of him that heareth thereof shall tingle. Special severities will overtake apostate professors; therefore, they had better know what they are at. You cannot trifle with the Christian faith, you cannot be a traitor and quietly glide away: you shall be marked as the son of perdition; you shall be known like Judas, as one for whom it would have been better that he had never been born. A profession of Christianity, without the real possession of it, will turn out to be a mantle of fire to him who puts it on. Such is the run of this passage. But at the same time, reading between the lines, and considering the verses very carefully, another reading is suggested: God, if he does not show distinguishing judgment, will display distinguishing grace. Without twisting the passage at all, I will use the whole of it as setting forth that peculiar favour which God intends to exhibit towards his own chosen, and of which they shall be the subjects, to the praise of the glory of his grace. I see within this black cloud of threatening a bright light of infinite mercy, a silver lining of love. A golden thread of grace runs through these threatening verses, for the Lord speaks of taking away the rebels from among his people; but all along, when he addresses the remnant of his people, his tone is that of grace. He solemnly threatens judgments, but these are preparations for mercy. He preaches to them by the prophet concerning mercy and judgment, blended in effectual working for salvation. Lovingkindness underlies and overlays his wrath. He puts on a frown in order to smile. He deals hardly with his chosen that he may deal safely with them; killing them that he may make them alive; piercing them with the arrows of conviction that he may pour in the wine and oil of his healing comforts.

The central part of my text is this,—"*I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.*" I want briefly to explain what that means. Our second subject shall be *the method which God often pursues with men when he is bringing them into the bond of the covenant.* By terrible things in righteousness he saves those whom he determines to bring to himself. When we have spoken upon that matter, our third point will be *the ultimate design of it all,*—of his severity in leading them by so stern a way, and of his love in bringing them into the bond of the covenant: the design is, "Ye shall know that I am Jehovah." Judgment and mercy are both intended to make men know in their inmost souls that he who thus deals with them is indeed the living God.

I. First, then, the MEANING OF BRINGING MEN INTO THE BOND OF THE COVENANT.

If we take the passage as referring to the work of grace, it signifies that *they shall know under what covenant they stand.* Beloved, there is scarcely a more important question for all of us than this: under which covenant do we live? Are we under law or under grace? By the very fact of our creation we are under bonds to our Maker to love and serve him, and this is a form of the covenant of works. In serving God we should have found happiness; in rebelling against him we have

found sorrow. Thus the covenant, which was bound up with the very nature of things, had its sanctions of reward and penalty. Without being strictly defined in words, the foundation of it was laid from the first. But God put it into words when he dealt with us in Adam our first covenant-head. He was forbidden to eat of the fruit of one special tree, and he was warned that in the day in which he should eat of it he should surely die. This covenant was speedily broken; man being in honour continued not. Our whole race in Adam broke the covenant, and fell from its high estate. There we lie by nature, condemned under the covenant of works. Set forth as that covenant is in the ten commands of the law, it is as terrible as it is pure. The commandment is holy, and just, and good, but we constantly violate it. The perfect law has been broken by all of us: by some it has been violated openly by wanton, wilful acts of rebellion; by all of us it has been broken in heart and will. He that breaketh one link has broken the chain; he that is guilty of one command is guilty of the whole law; for it is one and indivisible. Now, ye that are under the law, hoping to be saved by your own works, see where ye are: as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse, for "cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." Whatever excellences you may have, and you have many in the sight of men, yet if you are under that covenant of works your comeliness is turned into corruption. "This *do* and thou shalt live," is no promise to you now, seeing you have failed to *do;* but it becomes to you a curse because of your transgressions. But there is another and a better covenant, which is not a covenant of works at all, but of free, rich, sovereign grace. It was made of old with Christ the second Adam, our better Covenant-Head. Its tenor was on this wise—he shall obey the Father's will: actively and passively he shall do and suffer the will of the Most High; and in doing so he shall save those whom the Father hath given him. A great multitude inherit the reward of Christ's perfect obedience; for, being chosen by God, and having the Lord Jesus to be their Representative, they are made to live by his fulfilling and honouring of the law. The great question for each one is—Am I under that new covenant? that covenant of grace and peace?—that covenant "ordered in all things and sure"? You can answer that question by this one, Are you in Christ Jesus? Are you resting wholly on him alone? If so, mark this: the Lord has said by his servant Isaiah, "I have given him for a covenant to the people." If you have Christ you are in the covenant of grace; if you are trusting in him, God hath made with you an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, concerning which we read in your hearing just now, both in Jeremiah xxxi, and in Ezekiel xxxvi. Dwell on those covenant promises. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you"; and again, "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Oh, the blessedness of being under such a sure covenant! This is what is aimed at, that God may bring his own from under the law, and place them under the covenant of grace. Though as yet they care nothing about it, he will bring them to know and realize that they are standing in the covenant

of grace, with Christ as their Covenant-Head. The drift of the inward work is to lead them to accept the gift of God, and so to come "into the bond of the covenant."

They shall, secondly, be *led to see how this covenant binds them to God.* If you are in that covenant you belong to God, and he will have you; for the Christ will not shed his blood in vain, nor pay a ransom price for that which he will not possess. He will keep to himself the spoil which he hath taken from the hand of the mighty, and his Father will give him to see of the travail of his soul, and to be satisfied. If you are in that covenant you belong to the Lord for ever, neither shall it be possible for you to be your own, or to be the devil's. You are "the sheep of his pasture, and the people of his hand," and he will keep you as the apple of his eye, and preserve you as the jewels of his crown. You are bound to him if you are in covenant: do you wish to break that covenant? Do you wish to depart from the solemn obligations which that covenant of love casts upon you? Though this covenant be not of works, it produces more works than the covenant of works ever could do; for, being saved by grace, it is written, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Grace, and the gratitude which comes of it, form a firmer bond to hold the soul from straying than the hope of reward can possibly be; it is stronger than the fear of hell. O, mighty grace, thou dost hold us with the cords of a man from which we never desire to escape. We are the Lord's people, and he is our God. He holds us, and we hold to him. He is our husband, and our hearts are knit to him. The bond of the covenant unites us to the thrice holy God, and none shall break the sacred union.

To come under the bond of the covenant means also *to come under the discipline of the covenant;* for they that are in gracious covenant with God will find that he dealeth with them as with sons, and, inasmuch as he loves them, they shall know the truth of that word,—"As many as I love I rebuke and chasten." "If they break my covenant," saith he, "I will chasten them with the rod of a man"; and again, "You only have I known of all the nations of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities." If you enter into covenant with God, and you turn aside even in little matters, you shall soon discover that the Lord is a jealous God. If you are sweet to God he will make sin bitter to you. He will not let you transgress as other men do: the goats may wander with impunity, but the sheep may not. God reserveth the ungodly unto the day of judgment, but judgment beginneth even now at the house of God. His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor if he purges nothing else. You cannot be in covenant with God and yet be let alone in your transgressions; for it is to the reprobate that he saith, "Let him alone, he is given unto idols." The mark of God's people is that if they sin they smart, and if they wander they are whipped back. Despondency, sickness, bereavement, loss, and even temporal death may fall upon the chosen as visitations of God to deliver them from the power of Satan. So, you see, it is God's design to bring his people to know their covenant standing, to see how the covenant binds them to their God, and to feel that this holds them under a holy discipline, such as God does not exercise upon the mass of mankind, but only upon "a people near unto him."

Further, this coming under the bond of the covenant means surely that *they yield to its restraint.* I do not know how to give better expression to what I mean than by quoting the lines we often sing :—

"Oh to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrain'd to be!
Let that grace, now, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to thee."

Can grace ever be a fetter? Oh, yes, it is the most blessed of all fetters, for it holds us fast, and yet never violates our liberty. It binds the very heart in willing captivity. This is the bond of the covenant. "Oh," says one, "I do not want to be under any bond." Then, in all probability, you are bound by the chains of self-will. In grace you can be under bonds, yet not in bondage. I am in the bonds of wedlock, but I feel no bondage; on the contrary, it is a joy to be so bound. The bonds of love, and the cords of a man, cause no chafing. The bond of grace is a marriage bond, uniting us to him whom we love above all, even the altogether lovely Bridegroom of our souls. It is our joy to look up to our Covenant-Head, and obey him in all things. This bond holds us back from doing what it would be to our injury to do; it restrains us from sinning against God. Instead of wishing to be free of this bond, we desire to realize it in its most stringent form, by being crucified with Christ, nailed up hands and feet, so as to be incapable of following the wandering wishes of the unregenerate nature. O, that we were utterly incapable of sin! Would God we were bound to holiness as with belts of steel. I hope many of you feel the blessed restraint of covenant relationship, so that you cry with Joseph, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" The love of Christ both restraineth and constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died, and that he died for all that they which live might not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again. Blessed bond of the covenant! Oh, to wear its easy yoke, and bow before its gentle sceptre! The heart is never so free as when it is brought into complete captivity to the love of God. The true freedom of the will is freedom from sin. O, Lord, truly I am thy servant, thou hast loosed my bonds; and now I cry, Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar.

But surely, it means also *the security of the covenant,*—"I will bring thee under the bond of the covenant," must mean, I will bind thee to the Lord Jesus, thy Surety and Bondsman, and he shall secure thee for ever. This covenant is everlasting, a covenant of salt, hence we sing,—

"This bond shall never break,
Though earth's old columns bow;
Our sure foundations never shake,
We're one with Jesus now."

One with Jesus we shall ever be, for who shall separate us? That is a blessed phrase which speaks of our soul being bound up in the bundle of life with the soul of the Lord our God. This is what the covenant has done for us,—it has made us so one with Christ, and in Christ so one with the eternal Father, that it is written, "I will never leave thee

nor forsake thee." Bound by everlasting bonds, who shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord? I cannot linger longer over the precious truth, but surely it is an unspeakable privilege to be brought into such a covenant-bond. I trust many of you know by experience what it means.

How earnestly do I pray that some who have been strangers to this matter may begin to spell it out this morning. Oh, you whom God means to save, I trust he has brought you into such a condition that you would give your eyes to come from under the covenant of works, since there is no salvation there. You feel it must be grace alone that can save such unworthy creatures as you are; and, though you cannot as yet see spiritual truth, you are longing and looking out for some ground of hope in the infinite loving-kindness and long-suffering of God in Christ Jesus. Well, be of good cheer, for I am going to talk to you now about the way in which God deals with many whom he brings under the bond of the covenant.

II. This is our second head. THE EXPERIENCE OF SOME IN COMING UNDER THE BOND OF THE COVENANT. I do not want to be mistaken; I believe that many are brought under the bond of the covenant by very simple and gentle means, especially those who sweetly yield to the gentle drawings of the Holy Spirit. Very early in life some are brought to Jesus with little terror or distress of mind. Let them be very grateful for it. If you come to Christ I do not care how you come; for I am sure you could not have come at all if the Father had not drawn you; and if he has drawn you, there is no mistake in your method of coming. If you have tasted but little of the bitterness of sin because you have been kept from it by preventing grace, do not raise a question on that account. Though you may not have been made to sit and sigh in the blackness of darkness, it is enough if you now see the great light. The Lord in great tenderness brings many of his children to himself early in the morning, so early that they enjoy a long and blessed day in his service, and they are strangers to those broken bones which come of a long sojourn in the enemy's camp.

These Israelites to whom Ezekiel spoke had gone very far into sin, as far as ever they could go: they had been false to their promises, wicked in their lives, and rebellious in heart against their God. With many of this character the Lord deals with a singular severity of love. He strikes them with a sword, for so only can their sins be slain. Of those processes of grace we will speak now.

To begin, will you follow me in the text at the thirty-fourth verse? Here were a people whom God had chosen to be his own, but they had ignored that choice, and had said to themselves that they would be like the families of the countries, to serve gods of wood and stone. Many among those whom the Lord has chosen in his secret purposes are saying in themselves, "We will never belong to those religious people; we will never be called cants, hypocrites, Methodists, or Presbyterians." They have a perfect horror of being ridiculed for Christ's sake. These persons are for the present perfectly satisfied to take their lot with the multitude; distinguishing grace has no charms for them. Hear, then, what God will do with such if he means to bring them under the bond of the covenant.

First, *he will cause them to come out from their present company:* "I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out." You do not mean to quit your present settlement, but you shall come out of it once for all. You shall feel yourself to be as a speckled bird among your former associates. The Lord will make you to loathe the amusements which are now your delight; and the lusts of the flesh, which you now follow after as the fish hastens to the bait, shall become abominations to you. You shall find in your old sins such death and corruption that you shall turn from them as a man turns from a rotting carcase. This God can readily enough accomplish by ways known to himself. Your old friends will miss you, and what is more, they will not desire you to return to them; you shall be so miserable that they will be glad to be quit of you. As the wounded stag retires into the depths of the forest to bleed and die alone, because those which are not wounded roughly push at it with their horns, so it shall be with you; you shall prefer solitude to the galling words of the ungodly. If the Lord has chosen you and you have chosen sin, he will deal with you with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, and make you to know his fury against evil. His love to you shall show itself in wrath against your sin. You shall come to think of God as angry with the wicked every day, for so he is. You shall hear that sentence sounding in your ears, "If he turn not, he will whet his sword, he hath bent his bow, and made it ready." What is more, you shall not only read the words, but you shall feel the arrows of vengeance sticking fast in you, till you long to escape from your transgressions. The Israelites in Egypt for a time were glad to dwell there, and they began to worship the gods of Egypt; but presently God put it into Pharaoh's heart to oppress them, and he did so most grievously, and Israel had to make bricks without straw, till their bondage grew unbearable and they cried unto the Lord their God. He will make it so with you if you are one of his, for out of the Egypt of the world you shall come. You may get the flavour of the leeks and the garlic, and the onions of Egypt, upon your palate, and delight in it; but you shall yet be made to nauseate that wherein you delight, and long for heavenly manna which you now despise. The Lord Jesus will seek out his own sheep, and separate them from all other flocks.

Note next, that God said *he would bring them into distress and loneliness,*—"And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people." It was not to be a wilderness, like the wilderness of sin where there were no inhabitants, but "I will bring you into the wilderness of the people." This is, indeed, a terrible wilderness; for you walk in the midst of crowds and yet you are perfectly alone; you mingle with the great congregation, and yet feel that none can enter into your secret. How wretched to sit here and feel that there is not another man like you in all this vast assembly. You have come into a howling wilderness wherein is no water of joy, or track of hope. Where now your mirth and giddiness? Where now your comrades in iniquity? The Lord can soon make the gay worldling into the desponding solitary. I have seen him touch proud young men, and they have been brought to deep humiliation of spirit, so as to be glad to sit down like little children and learn

the way of the kingdom. Oh, you stiff-necked, hard-hearted sinners, if God's almighty love goes forth, he will soon turn these hearts of stone into flesh, till you become ready to weep yourselves away because you have grieved your Saviour. Many here can remember when they were in that condition; when the ministry seemed a wilderness; they went up to hear the word preached, and others were converted, but they were not; the Bible itself seemed to be a wilderness, when they read it they found no comfort. The Book appeared to thunder at them; great pieces of ordnance were fired against their consciences out of its law. They turned to Christian friends, and sometimes to unchristian friends, but from neither the one nor the other could they obtain any help; no man understood them, they did not understand themselves; "they wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Like the Jews in Babylon, they sat down and wept. Then was fulfilled in them this word, "I will bring you into the wilderness of the people." This is God's way of bringing men to himself. He digs them up by the roots, that he may remove them and plant them by the rivers of waters in the garden of the Lord.

Read on. What does he say next?—"*and there will I plead with you face to face.*" Brethren, you that know what this means by experience must help me out, for I cannot describe it in words. When the Lord becomes so realized to the guilty conscience that there seems to be nothing anywhere except God and that poor sinner, face to face with one another, then there is a time of fear and trembling indeed. For God to stand face to face with an unpardoned sinner, and plead with him, is a matter of deep solemnity. Do you know it? The sinner then cries out with Job, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." If the Lord does but let loose his terrors upon men's minds, and deal with them hand to hand, then their beauty is consumed like the moth. The poor preacher tried often to touch their proud hearts, but he could not reach them; but when God comes by his Holy Spirit as a spirit of bondage, and begins to plead with them face to face, they are low in the dust right speedily. They know not how to answer the Lord for one of a thousand of the sins which he presses upon their consciences. When he lays judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, the hail soon sweeps away their refuges of lies. If I could have been saved by finding one excuse for my sin when I was under conviction, I could not have discovered it. I was without excuse. I knew that I was guilty, and I wondered that I was not sent to hell there and then. When once God pleaded with me "face to face" there was no help for it but to plead guilty at once.

The Lord further declares he will *plead with them as he pleaded with their fathers in the wilderness.* How did he do that? Why, very terribly indeed. Certain men had rebelled against God and against Moses, and he said "Hang up their heads in the face of the sun." At another time when certain of them rebelled against Aaron, the earth opened and swallowed them up; and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram went down alive into the pit. Once the Lord pleaded with them by sending fiery serpents among them, and multitudes were bitten and died; at another time the pestilence multiplied graves at each halting-place. He

brought them very low by these terrible pleadings! Had not Moses stood in the gap, as mediator; and had not Aaron intervened as a faithful high priest, they had been utterly consumed. Truly the Lord pleaded with them by terrible things in righteousness. Beloved, broken-hearted hearer, are you passing through that stage? Is God pleading with you in that fashion? Does he bring judgment after judgment upon you? Do his threatenings follow each other like peals of thunder? Has he burned up all your comfort? Has he scorched and withered all your confidence? Are you brought unto the dust of death? Do you cry out, "My soul chooseth strangling rather than life: day and night thy hand is heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer"? Believe me, you are not alone in such a dread experience: many of God's dear children have traversed this valley of deathshade, and by this road they have been brought under the bond of the covenant. It is not that God loves to treat us thus, for he doth not afflict willingly; but like a wise father he will not spare the rod and spoil the child. Self-confidence must be killed; carnal confidences must be destroyed; self-righteousness must be slain. The Lord will turn your sweetness into bitterness, and your light into darkness, that you may be fully weaned from your own ways, and may be made willing to be saved by sovereign grace.

What more does God do? Well, it is said, "*And I will cause you to pass under the rod.*" What is this passing under the rod? I have frequently seen sheep when the shepherd has required to count them: he makes them pass through a half-opened gate, and there he numbers them. They would all come rushing through, but the shepherd blocks the way, and as they come out one by one, he touches them with his staff, and so counts them. The Lord makes his chosen to pass through a narrow place, even a strait gate, where only one can come at a time, and there and then he counts them, and causes them to give an account of themselves individually. You have been hidden away among the thousands; but now you shall be made to appear as a separate individual, and so you shall come under the rod of the Lord, and be numbered with his flock. Perhaps you are frightened, as the sheep are when the shepherd counts them, for they think they are all going to be killed; but there is far more room for comfort than for dismay, for that which God counts he values, and if he visits you with special chastisement it is because he has special designs of grace towards you which you shall understand by-and-by.

Then mark this: as the shepherd by counting his own sheep declares and exercises his right of possession, so the Lord, when he wakens up our minds to feel our personality, causes us to recognise that we are not our own, but are bought with a price. What a blessed knowledge that is when we discover that we are not our own, for in it lies the brightest hope for us. If I had been my own I should have been lost: it is because I am the Lord's that I shall not be lost; for he will not lose the Father's gift, or his own purchase. They are kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, even as Jesus saith, "I give unto my sheep eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This is to come under the rod.—to be counted one by one, and to be accounted to belong to God alone.

Moreover, we come under the rod of rulership; for a rod in the old

time was the usual sceptre of kings. What a blessed thing it is when a man comes under the rulership of Christ; when he cries—

"I yield—by sovereign grace subdued;
Who can resist its charms?
And throw myself, by wrath pursued,
Into my Saviour's arms."

"I will bring you under the rod": that is, I will make you to yield willing obedience to my law and word.

It means, also, the rod of chastisement. "Happy is the man whom God correcteth." Let the afflicted rejoice in his adversities instead of being cast down thereby; for "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrow is unknown."

"I will bring you under the rod."

Now, have I been describing the experience of any person here? I feel sure I have. Thousands who will read these words will leap for joy as they exclaim, "This is precisely where I am. I said, 'Surely he is going to destroy me,' but if this is the way in which the Lord brings me under the bond of the covenant, I will ever bless his name." May the Holy Ghost apply these my words to all the prisoners of hope!

III. But time fails me, so I must close by noticing THE ULTIMATE DESIGN OF ALL THIS. This bringing them under the bond of the covenant has a grand intent in it.

The first design is evident in the text, it is *to bind them to God.* We should have gone astray long ago, and left our God entirely, if it had not been for our bitter experience when the Lord was making himself known to us. All the better crop comes in after-life from having a deep ploughing before the seed is sown. I bear the scars of my terrible convictions about me to this day, and they prevent my trifling with sin. When I came to Christ my soul was stripped to the skin; not a rag of my own righteousness or of my own strength remained upon me. I was worse than a beggar; I was utterly destitute, and did not even know how to beg. It seems to me that some of my brethren came to Christ with a good coat on, and have never ceased to wear it under his grace-given robes. Too many are unable to say "Grace" without stuttering; but when a man's mouth has been washed out with the wormwood of self-humiliation, it is a fine thing for his pronunciation; he can say "Grace," I will warrant you, and give it a full emphatic sound. If anybody had said to me "You are a saved soul, and the Lord has put away your sin; but your salvation is the result of a good natural disposition," I am afraid I should have proved the reverse by calling him a liar to his face. It would have angered me to hear such a falsehood. Grace alone has made me to differ, and saved me through faith in Christ Jesus. I cannot go any further, my brethren. My highly-intelligent, cultured brethren may go where they like, but I must abide with the doctrines of grace. The march of proud human intellect will end with the devil; but I am bound in all sincerity to continue where I began, namely, with free grace. Where else can I go? Nowhere else is there for me a beam of light, or a ray of comfort. Rock

of ages, I am secure on thee! But once off that foundation I sink in a quicksand. Much of our smarting experience in coming home to God is meant so to bring us under the bond of the covenant that we shall never leave it again. We have had such a drilling and dressing that the very thought of any other salvation but that which is of grace is detestable to us.

The next design of God is that he may *entirely separate his people from the world.* "I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me." When God makes his servants bitterly to know the evil fruit of sin, then they no longer hunger for that forbidden fruit. "Oh, you are straight-laced," says one. Indeed we are where sin is concerned. A boy climbed into a neighbour's garden, and stole unripe plums, and, after eating them, he became very ill, and was forced to drink pints of horrible physic to save his life. When he was better his school-fellows said to him, "Come with us, and steal some plums"; but they seemed to be mocking him. The boy is very straight-laced, is he not? He recollects the gripes and the pains which those plums brought him, and he will have no more of them. The burnt child dreads the fire. Thus the Lord often brings his people away from their sins by giving them sharp and cutting experiences of what evil will do for them. If such be the present consequences of sin, they begin to guess what sin will bring them when they come into judgment and condemnation on account of it.

Furthermore, the Lord chastens his people thus *that he may bring them into their own land of promise* into the rest of his love. Whereas this text tells us of the rebels that they shall not enter into the land of Israel, it is implied that those who obey the divine command shall enter into the land of promise and peace. Blessed be God for the land of promise, into which we enter by faith! What a subject! I wish I had a week in which to preach upon it. When you quit the desert of Sinai, or the covenant of works, you enter into the land of promise, or the covenant of grace, and then you plead the precious promises of God, and realize the riches of his grace to the delight of your soul. Then is it true "so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." But no man ever gets to live upon the promise of God till first of all he is weaned from all self-reliance, and all self-glorying. When God has stamped self with the seal of death, and we have seen destruction written upon all carnal confidence, then we are glad to accept as a gift that which we can never win as a reward. The table of covenant-grace is loaded when in all the land of human merit there remains not a morsel of bread. None so joyfully enter into the land of grace as those who are weary of the wilderness, and can find no rest in their own doings. As the way to Canaan was across a desert, so the way to the covenant is often by a bitter experience; and as the land that floweth with milk and honey was all the lovelier because of the howling wilderness, so is grace all the more precious because of the utter failure of self.

Last of all, the great end of all is *that we may know the Lord.* I speak thoughtfully when I say I fear that large numbers of professors do not know the Lord: that is to say, the Lord Jehovah, as known to Ezekiel, is not known by many who profess to believe in the true God. Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the God and Father

of our Lord Jesus Christ, but he is not the god of the nineteenth century. This generation has made a god of its own. The effeminate deity of the modern school is no more the true God than Dagon or Baal. I know him not, neither do I reverence him. But Jehovah is the true God: he is the God of love, but he is also robed in justice; he is the God of forgiveness, but he is also the God of atonement; he is the God of heaven, but he is also the God who sends the wicked down to hell. We, of course, are thought to be harsh, and narrow-minded, and bigoted: nevertheless, this God is our God for ever and ever. There has been no change in Jehovah. He has revealed himself more clearly in Christ Jesus; but he is the same God as in the Old Testament, and as such we worship him. When a man has smarted because of his sin, and has been made to feel the burning coals of anguish in his own spirit; when the Lord has set him up as a target, and shot at him with arrows which drink up his life; and when afterwards he has been saved, and the splendour of infinite love has shone upon him, then he knows Jehovah. When God has brought the contrite man into the place of security, comfort, joy, and delight in Christ Jesus, then he knows the Lord. The full-orbed Deity is beheld by the broken and contrite in the day of his deliverance; neither does he know which to adore and admire most, the power, the wisdom, the justice, or the grace of God. We love everything that is in God when we are brought under the bond of the covenant. May God bless this word to many sorrowing spirits, for Jesus' sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Jeremiah xxxi. 31-37; Ezekiel xxxvi. 25-32; xx. 32-44.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 17TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."—Colossians iii. 13.

To whom is this exhortation addressed? The apostle speaketh thus in the twelfth verse: "Elect of God, holy and beloved." Here are three particulars. They are, first of all, "elect of God," that is to say, chosen according to his eternal purpose. They are made choice ones by being thus chosen. Next, they are sanctified by the Spirit of God, and are, therefore, called "holy": this holiness appertaining to their persons and their pursuits, their calling and their conversation. When the Spirit of God has fully done his work he sheds abroad in their hearts the love of God, so that experimentally they feel themselves to be "beloved." To abide in the love of God is the fruit of election, and the result of holiness. If any of you can with humble confidence claim these three titles, "elect of God, holy and beloved," you are among the most favoured of all mankind: of you the Father hath made a special choice, in you his Holy Spirit has wrought a special work, and you possess within your souls the special joy of living in the love of God. "Elect of God, holy and beloved": it is as you enjoy these three things that you will find it easy to carry out the precept which is now set before you, "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

Note in our text, before we proceed to the full discussion of it, what an honour this scripture puts upon our Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians iv. 32 a similar precept is placed in a rather different form; for it runs thus: "Even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Here, as if to show the true and proper equality of the Christ with God, it is written, "Even as Christ forgave you." In the Revised Version they read, "even as the Lord forgave you"; but they place in the margin, "Many ancient authorities read *Christ*." In that case we see that Lord and Christ were interchangeable terms when those ancient authorities were alive. None can forgive sins but God only. He alone forgives against whom the sin is committed. Sin, therefore, being against Christ, and Christ being able to forgive it, we see that he is exalted on high to give remission of

sins. He shares in the high and royal prerogative of God, seeing he is able to forgive sin.

Doth not this expression seem to say that albeit the apostle and other inspired writers had many things to write of, yet one thing was always upon their hearts, namely, to honour their Lord? Is not this a proof of how thoroughly they were under the influence of the Spirit of God, of whom Jesus said, "He shall glorify me"? Whatever he is teaching, whatever duty he is enforcing, whatever promise he is delivering, he taketh care so to do it that the Lord Jesus Christ is exalted in the hearts of his people thereby. Let us in our hearts adore the anointed One, Christ Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, and never let us hesitate to honour the Son even as we honour the Father. Let us as penitents adore the pardoning Saviour, seeing he hath power to forgive sins, and hath cleansed the myriads of his redeemed from all their iniquities.

But, brethren, while this gives glory to Christ, what a weight is lent to the precept, since it is supported by the example and the authority of our divine Lord: "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." What a model is set before us! How perfect is that spirit of love which we are to manifest! Even as Christ forgave us we are bidden to forgive others; what nobler pattern could have been chosen? Surely he that trifles with this precept, or thinks it one that is left to our option to obey or to neglect, cannot rightly know the dignity of the Christ in whose pierced hand this law is held forth before our eyes. Depend upon it, this command so wondrously linked with the Person of the pardoning Christ is of no common importance. If the law given by Moses was so solemnly binding, what shall we say of this law which is embodied in the life of the Lord Jesus? Surely I shall scarcely need to plead with you, who are his disciples, that you give your heart's best attention to such teaching. Your Lord himself stands before you; you remember how he forgave you all your trespasses, and I am sure you will give earnest heed to his exhortation to forgive. May the dove-like Spirit now brood over this assembly, and create love in all our bosoms.

Two things are to be done. First, let us *study the pattern of forgiveness* here set before us; and then, secondly, let us *copy it for ourselves* in our forgiveness of those who trespass against us.

I. Carefully STUDY THE PATTERN OF FORGIVENESS set before us in the text. "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." *What is this forgiveness of Christ?* You know how he exhibited it in his daily life. He was much tried, but he was never provoked to wrath. Both by friends and by enemies he was made to suffer, yet he neither accused the one nor the other to his great Father. He never reviled those who reviled him, but patiently yielded to their malice, giving his back to the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off the hair. His disciples he gently rebuked, but he never spake to them in anger. A life of forgiveness was crowned by his dying prayer for his persecutors, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He loved his enemies; he lived for his enemies; he died for his enemies. He was incarnate gentleness, the mirror and paragon of forgiveness.

Observe, that he forgave offences most great and grievous. It was a horrible thing that when the Lord Jesus came into the world moved by pure love, he was not welcomed, but Herod sought to slay the young

child. Afterwards, when he appeared publicly among men, the Jews took up stones to stone him. He was treated with contumely; his miracles were ascribed to the devil, and his holy and unspotted character was traduced by his being called a drunken man and a wine-bibber. He was the firstborn of the lord of the vineyard; but when the husbandmen saw him, they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be our's." You know with what scornful cruelty they treated him in the hour of his passion. What could the malice of hell have invented more contemptuous and cruel than that which men used towards the Well-Beloved? Had he been the basest of beings, his sufferings would have been too cruel. Men did all they could against him. Say not that *you* have never thus transgressed. Oh, sirs, we also have crucified him; for our sins were laid upon him by Jehovah. We also must confess, "He was despised, and we esteemed him not." There was a time when we, who are now his followers, once "hid as it were our faces from him." He called us, but we gave him no answer; he wooed us, but we were blind to his beauties. We can never remember this without deep emotions of regret. We used no other friend so ill. We crucified him and slew him, as far as we were able to do it, by our rejection of his love; and yet he has forgiven us. He is ready to forgive all such as seek his face. Oh, the splendour of that love which blots out sins like ours! What a flood of grace is this which rises above the tops of the mountains of our sins, and covers them for ever. It mattereth not how black or crimson our transgressions may have been, the moment we come to Jesus he makes us whiter than snow. He puts away the most horrible of offences, the most glaring of transgressions, in a moment; he says, "I forgive thee; go, and sin no more"; and we, there and then, receive a perfect pardon. I would that all of you who have never sought that grace would be induced by this blessed fact to come with all your sins about you, and receive immediate absolution from the hand of your Lord.

Remember, also, to increase your wonderment at his forgiveness, that these offences which were committed against Christ were altogether wanton and unprovoked. He could demand of his adversaries, "For which of those works do ye stone me?" Towards no man had he acted unjustly or even harshly. He had been all tenderness and lowliness in every place towards all sorts of men, and yet certain men became incensed against him because of his goodness. Did they refuse to love him because he was altogether lovely? Did they despise him because he was so truly great? Such is the depravity of the human heart that the very virtues of Christ provoked the hostility of men. What has my Lord Christ ever done against any of you? Wherefore do ye refuse him? I have heard many a man say, "If I had done anything whatever to provoke this ill-will I could account for it, but they persecute me wrongfully." It was pre-eminently so in the case of our Lord, who says in the Psalm, "They hated me without a cause." Yet he forgave this wanton malice. He continues to forgive such causeless wrong. With his own blood he blots out horrible insults against his person, his people, his gospel, and his love. Even you who oppose his kingdom and refuse his service, shall be at once forgiven if you will bow your hearts before him and accept that rich mercy which his hand is so ready to bestow.

See what a pattern is here of the passing-by of the greatest and most malicious offences! How can hatred live in the presence of such love?

This pardon Christ has shown to the most unworthy persons. Of all that he forgave when he was here below none deserved such kindness; in fact, to talk of deserving forgiveness is a contradiction in terms. Certainly in me, and I have no doubt in you, my brothers and sisters, who have tasted of his infinite mercy, there was no pretence of claim to his mercy in our cases. If he had left us in our sin, if he had passed us by and allowed us to perish, what complaint could we have brought against him? Since he loved us and forgave us, it must have been because of something within himself; it could not have been from anything in us. We are unworthy, but he is gracious; and herein he teaches us to pardon the most provoking and worthless of those who trespass against us.

Be it never forgotten that he always had the power to have executed vengeance upon any one of us if he had pleased so to do. Some men pardon because they cannot punish; they are too weak to execute vengeance, and therefore they refrain from it. Half the forgiveness in the world comes rather from a feeble hand than from a forgiving heart; but the Christ could have crushed his adversaries in a moment if he had willed it, and yet he freely forgave. When they said, "Come down from the cross,"—suppose he had instantly loosed the nails and leaped among them, where had they been? They would have begged the rocks to fall upon them, and the mountains to cover them from his face, if he had but manifested the glory of his power: but he was not provoked to leave the cross, or to break the silence of his passion by so much as a rebuke. Mercy was stored like honey in his heart, and pardon dropped its sweetness from his lip. The Lord has been greatly long-suffering with ourselves when a breath might have destroyed us. We might easily have been destroyed in accidents which befell us, or we might have died in our various sicknesses, and so have sunk to the lowest hell; but instead of slaying us, our Lord even interposed to spare us,—to spare us when our life was rebellion. When he could so easily have blotted out our lives, he did not so, but in boundless mercy blotted out our sins. Let us magnify his amazing grace, and imitate it in our lives.

I want you for a moment to consider the question, *How did he forgive?* The manner of our Lord's forgiveness is as noteworthy as the pardon itself. The Lord Jesus came and pardoned us when that act of grace was unsolicited: before we had thought of mercy he had thoughts of mercy toward us. I remember reading in one of our magazines a story of a city missionary who discovered a poor girl who had wandered from the ways of virtue, and sought to restore her to a better life. He spoke with her till she became somewhat tender of heart. He enquired about her family, and learned that she had once enjoyed a happy home, and had known a tender father's love. "But he would never look at me now," said she; "I am sure he never would; I am such a degraded creature that I could not venture near his door." "Have you never written to him?" "No, I could not write to him; it would be of no use; I could not expect him to send me an answer, and it would break my heart to be

refused." "We will try," said the good man, "we will write to him." He wrote to the father, and the next post brought back an answer, with the word, "Immediate," written upon the envelope. The sum of the letter enclosed within was, "Ready to forgive." She was taken to her father; she was soon locked in his embrace; all was forgiven; the wanderer was restored. Notice, that her father had been praying for her night and day ever since she left his roof, and he had longed to receive her to his home again. Her seeking his forgiveness did not cause it; it was in his heart long before; and no doubt it was because of his cries and tears that God in mercy touched his girl's heart, and brought her home. O sinner, before thou thinkest of Christ he has thoughts of love towards thee. He says, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee." The forgiveness is first, and the returning to the Lord is urged as a consequence of that forgiveness. Pardon is not first in the matter of our personal experience, but it is first as matter of fact with God. Oh! the mercy of the Lord Christ, that before we know our sin he has made atonement for it by his own precious blood.

The Lord Jesus Christ is to be held up as an example of pardoning love for the true and hearty way in which he forgives sin. Forgiveness when it comes from human lips in measured, studied phrase, is not worth the having; for the heart is not in it, or it would be more free and joyful. The Lord Jesus Christ absolves sinners with all his heart: he never acts in a cold, formal manner. Never does he outwardly forgive and in secret retain his wrath; but wholly, entirely, joyfully, he puts away the sin of those whom he forgives, and puts it away for ever. When he forgives he forgives the whole of our faults, follies, failures, and offences. There is a certain solidarity about sin, so that it makes up one lump. I read the other day of a certain theologian speaking of Christ having put away original sin while he left actual sin. Nonsense! Sin is one and indivisible. Iniquity is not to be done up in separate parcels. The sin, the iniquity of men, is spoken of in the Bible as one thing. Although we sin multitudes of times the various streams all flow into one sea of evil: when sin is forgiven all sin is put away; not a shred, nor fragment, nor particle remains. The Lord Jesus drowns all the hosts of sin in the depths of the sea, and the whole of our guilt is swallowed up for ever. This is great forgiveness, indeed. Glory be to him who gives it! Let us follow him in his truth and heartiness.

This forgiveness, again, is given by the Lord Jesus Christ in the completest possible manner. He keeps no back reckonings; he retains no reserves of anger. He so forgives that he forgets. That is the wonder of it: he says, "I will not remember thy sins." He casts them behind his back; they are wholly and completely gone from his observation or regard. Alas, such is poor human nature, that even fathers, when they have forgiven a wayward child, will, perhaps, throw the offence in his teeth years after, when he again offends; but it is never so with Christ. He says, "Thy sins shall not be mentioned against thee any more for ever." He has done with the sins of his people in so effectual a way that not a whisper concerning them shall ever come from his mouth so as to grieve them. They will themselves remember their sins with deep repentance; but the Lord will never challenge them on account of their

past rebellions. Blessed be the name of Christ for such complete forgiveness as this.

The Lord Jesus Christ forgives his people in a continuous manner. He forgave us long ago: he still forgives us. He does not forgive and afterwards accuse; his forgiveness is eternal; it is not a reprieve he gives to you, believing ones, but a free pardon, under the King's hand and seal, which shall effectually protect you from accusation and punishment. "In those days, and in that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I reserve." He hath finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. Send to hell a pardoned sinner! It were a contradiction to the very nature of God. Condemn those for whom Jesus died! Why, the apostle mentions that death as a conclusive answer to the challenge, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." How shall he intercede for us and yet accuse us? It is impossible for Christ to be both Redeemer and Condemner to the same persons. So perfect is his pardon that our sin has ceased to be; he hath put away sin for ever by the sacrifice of himself.

Greatly do I admire the very gracious way in which that pardon is given. Some people offer forgiveness in an ungracious way; they make it appear that they are coming down from such awful heights when they forgive a fellow-mortal. In great dignity they march down in state from their own splendid innocence to the poor brother who has done them a wrong; as good as saying, "I will condescend to do this, though it is an awful stoop for such an angelic being as I am." You never feel that about the Christ, for he places his pardon down so low that he seems to say, "Receive my mercy, I beg you to receive it." He speaks as if he were favoured by a sinner's accepting his forgiveness. He humbles himself, and never scalds a sinner with scornful pity. Though the Christ condescends more than all the condescensions of all men put together, "for worms were never raised so high above their meanest fellow-worms," yet the condescension is so real and royal that there is no ostentation in it; he is to the manner born; he condescendeth naturally, like condescension's own self. Some are proudest when they stoop; but Jesus graciously seemeth to put himself on a level with us, aye, and even to go lower than we are, that he may lift us up. Admire as much the way in which Christ forgives as the forgiveness which he bestows. It breaks my heart to think what a loving Christ he was to me when I sought his forgiveness. Truly "He giveth liberally, and upbraideth not": he frowned and thundered when I looked to my own righteousness, but when I turned to his gospel of free grace I had from him not even a hard word, but he was all love and tenderness to me, the chief of sinners.

Above all, the greatness of his forgiveness is seen in the fact that the offence had brought great trouble into the world, and he bore that trouble. The sinner, by his wrong doing, had subjected himself to great loss and calamity. Now, when we forgive a person who has done us a wrong we say, "I freely forgive you, but you have involved

yourself in certain consequences which you will have to bear, and out of these I cannot help you." Our blessed Master seemed to say, "Sinner, thou hast sinned thyself under the curse of God, thou hast sinned thyself into misery and into death, and as the proof that I do freely forgive thee I will take all this suffering and this death upon myself. Thou hast done the wrong wantonly and wickedly, but I will bear the consequences. Thou hast knotted the whips, they shall scourge my shoulders; thou hast sharpened the nails, they shall pierce my hands and feet; thou hast put thyself under curse and penalty, I will bear the curse of death that thou mayst be free." Was there ever mercy like this? Do not all who know this love accept it gladly? Sinner, do you not know this? Have you never heard about it? Know you not that the Lord, even Jesus, the Son of God, is able to forgive you all your trespasses, that it will be a joy to his heart to do so, and to do it at once? Oh, that before that clock shall strike again you may be able to say, "There is therefore now no condemnation, for Christ has put away my sin." This is not according to the manner of men; it is Godlike: it is a sure proof that Jesus is the Son of God, for who could act like this but One who is himself the Son of God?

Thus have I set before you, in my poor way, this great forgiveness, and the manner of it. I trust you have had an experience of it. Assuredly we all need such forgiveness: do any of you deny it? May the Holy Spirit open your blind eyes, and melt your hard hearts. According to the text, those who have received pardon know that they have it; for Paul speaks positively,—"Even as Christ forgave you"; as if it were a matter of fact well known among the people of God. There is a theory abroad that we may be forgiven and not know it; that Jesus may forgive, and we may never discover it until we come unto our dying moments. That is a wretched kind of gospel; but by the true gospel we may know we are forgiven, and be sure of it; surer than if we saw, written by the autograph of Christ, the words—"I have forgiven thee." The eyes may deceive, but the witness of the Spirit of God within the heart can never delude us. If thou believest that Jesus is the Christ, and if thou art resting alone on him, thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee; "for the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Knowing that we are forgiven by Christ, let us be clear and decided in our forgiveness of others: not in word only, but in deed and in truth, let us exhibit a forbearing spirit.

II. You see your example. Our second word is, COPY IT FOR YOURSELVES. If the Holy Spirit enables you to write according to this copy, you will have the approval of the Lord resting upon you. See how large and clear the letters! It will be no small success if you can reproduce them. "Even as Christ forgave you"; the imitation should be as exact as possible. Mark the "even," and the "so," and endeavour to keep touch with your gracious Lord.

Notice, however, in the text, that this precept concerning the imitation of Christ in forgiveness is *universally applicable*. The text is not long, but see how unqualified is its range. "Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any." You see it is not put that superiors are to forgive inferiors; or, on the other hand, that the less are to forgive the greater; but the circle of the

command includes the whole: it is, "forbearing one another." The rich are to be forbearing to the poor, the poor are to be forbearing to the rich; the elderly man is to forgive the junior for his imprudence, the junior is to bear with the petulance and slowness of the elder. It is an all-round business, implying that one of these days I shall have to forgive you, and you will have to forgive me. Personally, I tax your forbearance to put up with me; and I need not say that sometimes I have need to exercise forbearance towards one and another in so large a church. We have all our own angles and edges, and these are apt to come into contact with others. We are all pieces of one puzzle, and shall fit in with each other one day, and make a complete whole; yet just now we seem misshapen and unfitting. Our corners need to be rounded. Sometimes they are chipped off by collision with somebody else; and that is not comfortable for the person with whom we collide. Like pebbles in the river of the water of life, we are wearing each other round and smooth, as the living current brings us into communion: everybody is polishing and being polished, and in the process it is inevitable that some present inconvenience should be sustained; but nobody must mind it, for it is part of a great process by which we shall all come into proper shape, and be made meet for endless fellowship.

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another": you see it has two sides. "Ah," says one, "I cannot understand it; people ought to be far more forbearing to me." Just so; but the first point is that you should be forgiving towards them. What numbers of church members think that the duties of a church are all one-sided. "I was ill, and nobody came to see me." "Did you send for anybody to see you?" "No, I did not." Brother, before you find fault, remember your own fault; you have violated the command, "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church." "But nobody exhibits Christian love," says one. Is that true of yourself? I have noticed that the man who says that love is dead is usually rather short of love himself. How very different the church looks to different eyes: one sees a thousand virtues to admire, and another a world of evil to expose. One gratefully cries, "When I was ill, the dear brethren came to see me so often that I had even to ask them not to stay very long." Another grumbles, "I might have laid there a month, and nobody would ever have come near me." We understand the reason for this difference: the tone of the speech is the key to the riddle. As a rule, with what measure we mete it is measured to us again. I do not find Christ's people to be one half so faulty as I am myself. I meet with many Christians whom I think it an honour to know, and commune with; and those of another sort are useful to me as warnings, and as fields for exercising my graces. The forgiveness and the forbearance are needed all round, and we must both give and take. By the sweet love of Jesus, let us not fail in this business.

Let me say here that this matter is an absolutely essential one,—*this forbearance and this forgiveness are vital.* Be not deceived; God is not mocked: no man is a child of God who has not a likeness to God; and no man is forgiven who will not himself forgive. In the Middle Ages a certain baron had a feud with another nobleman, and determined to avenge himself for some insult, real or imaginary. His enemy was to pass by the castle with a small retinue, and therefore the baron

determined to waylay him and kill him, or, at least, to punish him severely, and exact a ransom. A holy man who lived in the castle begged and entreated the baron to forbear from bloodshed, and make peace; but for some time he pleaded in vain. The baron would not be appeased, but swore that he would be avenged of his adversary. So this godly man begged one favour of him, namely, that he would come with him into the chapel and offer prayer before he sallied forth. They knelt together in prayer, and ere they rose the saintly man said, "My lord, repeat after me the Lord's Prayer." He went on saying word by word, as the other did, till he came to that, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us"; but there the good man stopped, and said, "I charge you not to say this unless you really mean it! Do not mock the Lord. You may not go out and fight if you thus speak with God. You will have to appear before God and be judged for your sins, for you will not be forgiven if you do not forgive. Choose, then, either to utter this prayer and forgive, and be saved; or to refuse the prayer, and go forth to battle and be lost." The baron paused and bit his lip, but at last his better spirit prevailed, and he cried, "I cannot renounce my hope of heaven; I cannot renounce my hope of forgiveness; therefore my enemy shall pass by my castle in safety, and I will say, 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.'" Do not attempt to deceive God. If you must lie and cheat, practise your impositions upon your fellow-men, but do not imagine that you can flatter your Maker or deceive the Omniscient One. If you will not forgive, say so, and expect eternal perdition; but if you profess to be a Christian obey this great and essential precept, and forgive as Christ forgave you. Be honest, be straight with God, for he will be honest and straight with you; but if you cannot and will not forgive, then look forward to a portion with the tormentors; for even the loving Jesus says, "Neither shall my heavenly Father forgive you."

In urging you to this copying of Christ, let me notice that this forgiveness of those who offend against us is *gloriously ennobling*. We are not asked to perform a duty which will in the least degrade us. Revenge is paltry, forgiveness is great-minded. Was not David infinitely greater than Saul, when he spared his life in the cave, and when he would not smite him as he lay asleep on the battle-field? Did not the king humble himself before David when he perceived his forbearance? If you would be the greatest among men, bear injuries with the greatest gentleness; if you would win the noblest of conquests, subdue yourself. To win a battle is a little thing if it be fought out with sword and gun; but to win it in God's way, with no weapons but love, and patience, and forgiveness, this is the most glorious of victories. Blessed is that man who is more than a conqueror, because he inflicts no wounds in the conflict, but overcomes evil with good. In the process of such a conquest the warrior is himself a gainer. A nation in fighting, even if it wins the campaign, has to suffer great expense and loss of life; but he that overcomes by love, is the better and stronger man through what he has done. He comes out of the conflict not only victor over his adversary, but victor over sin within himself, and all the readier for future war against evil. He glorifies God and himself becomes strong in grace. Nothing is more glorious than love. Your Master, who is King of

kings, set you an example of gaining glory by enduring wrong: if you would be knights of his company, imitate his graciousness.

Notice that this imitation of Christ is *logically appropriate to you all.* Brothers, if Christ has forgiven you, the parable we read just now shows that it is imperative that you should forgive your fellows. If our Lord has forgiven us our ten thousand talents, how can we take our brother by the throat for the hundred pence, and say, "Pay me what thou owest"? If we are indeed members of Christ, should we not be like our Head? If we profess to be his servants, are we to pretend to a dignity greater than our Master, who washed his disciples' feet? If he forgave so freely, how dare we call ourselves his brethren if our spirit is hard and malice lingers within us?

I say, to conclude, that this copying of Christ is *most forcibly sustained by the example given in the text.* We are to forbear and to forgive; "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." I have heard it said, "If you pass by every wanton offence, and take no notice of it, you will come to be despised, and regarded as a person of mean spirit: your honour demands vindication." When Christ forgave you, did his honour suffer by that forgiveness? You transgressed most wickedly, and yet he forgave you; do you regard him as less honourable because of that readiness to pass by offences? Far from it: it is his glory to forgive. The hallelujahs of saints, and the songs of angels are sent up to his throne the more heartily because of the richness of his grace, and the freeness of his mercy. Dishonour indeed! What pride it is on the part of such poor creatures as we are to talk about our honour! Where is the honour of revenge? It is a dishonourable thing to put yourself on the level of him who injures you. A heathen philosopher used to say, "If an ass kicks you, is it necessary for the maintenance of your honour to kick that ass again?" That speech looks like a noble one, but yet it is too much flavoured with contempt. When you speak, or even think, of another who has wronged you as though he were only worthy to be regarded as a beast, you are not right in spirit, a degree of evil remains in your heart. Think of the offender without contempt, as well as without resentment. Believe that he is a brother worth winning. Say, "If he does me an injury, for that very reason I will do him a double service. My only vengeance shall be double love. I will not allow myself even to think hardly of him. I will put the best possible construction on all that he does, and thus show that the spirit of Christ is in me, conquering the spirit of fallen humanity both in me and in him."

Says one, "If we always overlook offences other people may be tempted to do us wrong also." Our text furnishes us with a ready answer to this also. The Lord Jesus Christ forgave you. Have you met anybody who has been tempted to do wrong because the Lord has forgiven you? He has freely forgiven myriads of poor unworthy sinners, and has that promoted sin? No. Is it not the very groundwork and cause of holiness in the world, that Jesus is so gracious as to pardon sin? Why then should your forbearance do harm? Do not you pretend to be so very wise; for therein you censure your Master. You are not the ruler of the world. It is not for you to be refraining from good for fear that evil may come of it: attend to your own ways, forgive every one his brother his trespasses, and leave consequences with God.

"Oh, but," says one, "I know several pious persons who are very unforgiving." You do not know any really good man who is of that character. I make bold to say that no man is really good if he has not a forgiving spirit. Unwillingness to forgive is a grievous flaw in anyone's character. But if there were such good people, what have you to do with them? Is the servant to imitate his fellow-servant, especially in his faults? The example set before you is, "Even as Christ forgave you." You have nothing to do with either saints or sinners in this matter; your Lord says to you, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." Perhaps you do not know all the story which you think proves that a good man has been unforgiving; and if you do know it, you are no judge of others. Mind your own business, and "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

But I hear another one saying, "These persons would not have forgiven *me*." Just so; but then you are a child of God, you are "elect, holy, and beloved." You are not to lower your standard to that of publicans and sinners. Does not Christ continually say, "What do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans and the sinners the same?" "If you love them that love you, what thank have ye?" But if ye love them that despitefully use you, then blessed are you when men shall persecute you. In that case you have an opportunity of showing your love to your Lord. When Dr. Duff first read to some young Brahmins in the Government school the precept, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you," one of the Brahmins cried out with delight, "Beautiful! Beautiful! This must have come from the true God. I have been told to love those that love me, and I have not always done *that;* but to love my enemies is a divine thought." That young man became a Christian under the influence of that precept. Do not darken this light, but be sure to display it in your life, that many may be attracted to Christ by its lustre. Let your goodwill go forth even to the worst of men, for Christ's sake. Forget *their* evil as you behold *his* goodness.

"Well," says one, "I would forgive the fellow, but he does not deserve it." That is why you are to forgive him: if he deserved it, you would be bound to do him the justice which he could claim; but as he does not deserve it, you have here an appeal to your Christian love. Does not your heavenly Father give good things to the unthankful and to the evil? Did not Jesus forgive the undeserving when he forgave you? Does he not overlook our wretched characters when he has mercy upon us?

I hear one say, "I cannot forgive!" That is a terrible confession. The apostle of the Gentiles said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Is not the same strength available for you? Some persons find forgiving and forgetting to be hard work; but as you are bound to do it or stop out of heaven, you must cry to God for help, and set about it with determination. If you are indeed a child of God you will soon find the difficulty gone; indeed forgiveness will become easy to you. To be forgiven is such sweetness that honey is tasteless in comparison with it; but yet there is one thing sweeter still, and that is to forgive. As it is more blessed to give than to receive, so to forgive rises a stage higher

in experience than to be forgiven. To be forgiven is, as it were, the root; to forgive is the flower. That divine Spirit, who bears witness with our spirit when he breathes peace into us because we are pardoned, beareth yet a higher witness with us when he enables us truly to pardon all manner of trespasses against ourselves. Let it never be said in a Christian church, that fellow-members bear a grudge against one another. I do not know that it is so in your case; assuredly it should not be so anywhere. Let it not be said of any Christian man, that he is unloving, ready to take offence, apt to bear malice, or quick to anger. Cultivate forbearance till your heart yields a fine crop of it. Pray for a short memory as to all unkindnesses. I bless God that I know a man who finds it easy to forgive and to forget all offences against himself. He takes no credit for so doing, for no one ever offends him in a way which is worth remembering. That man has been reminded again and again of the misbehaviour of unreasonable and unkind men, and he has honestly said, "I had quite forgotten it," He does not claim this forgetfulness as a virtue, for as a matter of fact his memory has become weak in that direction, and he has no desire to strengthen it. He has never tried to recollect unkindnesses, and now by long disuse his memory happily fails him upon such matters. That man has often enjoyed exquisite pleasure in doing good to those who have injured him; and he can truly say that at this moment he bears no ill-will to any soul upon this earth. He does not think this to be any singular attainment, for his belief is that every follower of Jesus should be of the same mind.

Do you not think the same? I am sure I do. I heard this man once say of another, "He spoke against me that which was false, but if he had known more of me, he might have said something far worse and have been nearer the truth. Perhaps my false accuser believed what he said, and thought he was doing a right thing in protesting against what he thought was my fault. At any rate, no one can harm my character, unless I do so myself." It is a wise thing to profit by every accusation, whether true or false, by trying to be better. Let us so live as to be able to say, "I am as much at peace with all men as a child new born." Thus shall we wear the mark of the Spirit of God. In a word, my brethren, "Even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Amen.

SCRIPTURES READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xviii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—30, 202, 293.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PRIVATE TUTOR.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 24TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."—John xiv. 24—26.

ALL through this thrice-blessed chapter man cuts a very sorry figure. Whoever it is that speaks, whether it be Philip, or Judas, or Thomas, each one displays his own ignorance, either by asking an unwise question or by making a mistaken request. Yet, brethren, these apostolic men were by no means inferior persons; but so superior that we sink into insignificance in comparison with them. Jesus made them heralds of his gospel, master-builders of his church; and if *they* displayed such ignorance, even when the Lord Jesus Christ himself had personally spoken to them, *we* must not wonder that we are apt to blunder; neither should we despair if we find ourselves dull and slow. If those fathers of the church so greatly needed to be taught of the Holy Ghost, how much more do we? If they could receive nothing except by the Spirit of God, how can we hope to be wise apart from his instructions? Our position should be sitting with Mary at the Master's feet, varied with bowing into the dust before the Lord under a humble sense of our folly. The chapter before us is well watered with streams of comfort; but yet I confess it is ever a valley of humiliation to me, as I see what poor creatures even the chief of saints are when left to themselves.

But, at the same time, how wonderfully throughout this passage do we see the lovingkindness of our God in condescending to the weaknesses of his people. In one verse of our text, the twenty-sixth, we have the whole Trinity at work upon the believer: "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name." There we have the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son, uniting their sacred energies for the illumination of the chosen. Each divine person seeks to make the other to be more fully known: the Son speaking what he hears with the Father, and the Spirit taking the things of the Son and revealing them to us; the whole Trinity working in us to will and to do

according to the divine pleasure. What *we* are, my brethren, is of small consequence compared with what *he* is who worketh all our works in us. What if we be nothing but clay; the great Potter knows how to fashion us to his praise. The great item is not what the clay is, but what the potter can make out of it. Let us not despond because of what we are by nature, but let us rejoice as we remember the wisdom and power of God who has begun a good work in us, and will not cease from his working till he has perfected his design. Wherefore, comfort one another with these thoughts. Lie low, and be more and more teachable; yet be hopeful, for you shall be taught. Confess your own ignorance, but confide in the Lord's power to teach you. Rest assured that even for you there is a noble destiny; God shall reveal himself to you and in you; and you shall not only know for yourself, but shall declare to principalities and powers in the heavenly places the manifold wisdom of God.

In handling my text at this time I desire to be entirely under the power of the Spirit of God. Not with enticing words of man's wisdom would I preach, not with the garnishings of oratory would I foolishly dream of lending power to the omnipotent word of God; but with all simplicity I would speak plainly that which the Holy Spirit teacheth by our text.

It appears to me that there are three things here worthy of patient observation: one is, *the test of a true believer*,—"He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings"; a second is, *the need of a true believer*—he needs to be taught of the Holy Ghost, and to have his memory refreshed by the same gracious Spirit,—"He shall bring all things to your remembrance." The best disciple needs help in his understanding, and in his memory. Thirdly, let us think of *the privilege of a true believer*,—"The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."

I. Let us begin with THE TEST OF A TRUE BELIEVER; and let each one consent to be tested. Let each man put himself into the scale, that he may know his weight; for the Lord pondereth the heart. He who never judges himself will perish in the judgment of the last great day.

I would draw your attention to the fact that in this passage, and elsewhere in Scripture, men are divided into two classes, and not a word is said of a neutral or intermediate class. The twenty-first verse says, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me"; and the twenty-fourth verse says negatively, "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." Evidently there are two sorts of persons in that part of the world which is visited by the gospel: he that loveth Christ, and he that loveth him not. If you once hear the gospel you can never be indifferent to it; you must either be its friend or its foe, its disciple or its opposer. If once the Lord Jesus Christ crosses the orbit of your life, you can never henceforth be neutral; you must either reject him or receive him; believe him or make him a liar. I would urge home upon each of you that simple but solemn truth, lest any person should think himself omitted from the range of my discourse. I would so spread the net that no fish may remain outside its meshes. The gospel must, in the nature of

things, be to you who hear it either a savour of life unto life, or of death unto death. By this gospel you shall be judged, and it shall either bring you where there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, or it shall leave you where you are condemned already because you have not believed upon the Son of God. Do not, therefore, hope to live and die as if there were no Christ. Attempt not to say, "He is nothing to me." Though you pass by the cross, and refuse to look on Christ, yet the Crucified One looks on you, and casts his shadow on your path. His blood will be upon you, either to cry out against you, as a murderer of the Son of God, or else to be your cleansing from all sin. As to the person of your Lord, it is evident that you either love him or do not love him; one of the two it must be. What is your condition at this hour? Sitting among the people of God in this house on this Sabbath day, are you lovers of the Lord Jesus, or are you enemies to him?

May God bless that stroke of the winnowing fan, so that by it the chaff may be separated from the wheat.

But *the test is this, the loving of Christ.* Loving Christ is not the way of salvation; that can only be ascribed to faith, as it is written, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." But the flower which comes out of the seed of faith is love, and faith is not true faith unless it worketh by love, and so purifieth the heart.

Observe, that *the love is personal:* "he that loveth *me* not." He speaks not here of love to doctrine, but of love to himself; "he that loveth *me.*" There is a personal Christ, and he is to be loved by each one of us individually. Do not think of Christ as a historic personage, who came and went away, whose memory may be dear, but who cannot personally be the object of a present love. If you are truly his disciple, and a partaker of his salvation, you love *him.* You realize him as a living person, as much so as your own self, as your dear wife or your near friend; and your heart in deed and in truth is bound to him. The tendrils of your affection must lay hold on Jesus, climbing upwards toward God by laying hold upon his Son. You may not always be able to *say* that you are sure that you love him, because your agony to be right may create in you a painful anxiety, and even a morbid jealousy as to your own sincerity; but you do love him if you are called by his grace, and if you do not love him, neither have you tasted of his power to save. When I read those words just now, "He that loveth me not," I felt as if I must repeat the words of Paul, and say, "Let him be Anathema Maranatha,"—cursed at the coming of the Lord; for is it not an awful thing for any heart to refuse to love Jesus? The most lovable of all beings is Jesus. It is unnatural not to love one so amiable. As streams of water naturally flow into the lowest part of the valley, so one would have thought that the condescension of Jesus for our sakes made it natural for the love of men to run towards him and concentrate itself within him. Alas, our nature is now unnatural, and it is only as the Spirit of God creates a new love in the heart that we yield our love to the ever-blessed Saviour. If we are not lovers of the Lord Jesus, the Spirit of all grace has not made us to know and trust Christ; for if we knew Jesus and trusted him our heart must be wedded to him. Christ trusted must be Christ beloved. We must love God when once the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost.

Judge ye yourselves, then: do you love Jesus truly and supremely? He saith, "He that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." He claims the first place in the hearts of his people. He is an all-engrossing Saviour, who will never be satisfied till he has monopolised all our affections and carried our hearts away to abide with him in the treasury above. Let it be a matter, then, of personal trial with each one of you. Hear your risen Lord saying, "Lovest thou me?" Not to Simon alone, but to you, John, and to you, Mary, he saith, "Lovest thou me?" He standeth here this morning, as once he stood by the lake of Galilee, and he puts this loving enquiry to each disciple, "Lovest thou me?" Is his adorable person the object of your intense regard? Can you fall at his feet and say, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee! Show me what thou wouldst have me to do."

Furthermore, as we look at this text we observe that, inasmuch as it is not always possible to gauge the emotions and the affections, *a further test is given us:* "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings." I may know, therefore, whether I love the Lord Jesus Christ by answering this further question, Do I keep his sayings? What meaneth this? It means, first, have we *a reverent regard for all the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ?* Do we receive them as being our standard of doctrine, and our rule of life? Remember that, in effect, all that is in the Old Testament as well as in the New must be considered to be the sayings of Christ; for he says that he came not to destroy the law, but to establish the law. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but not one tittle of the law shall fail. The whole record of inspiration is endorsed by Christ, and may be said to be his sayings. Now, do you accept these sacred Scriptures as your infallible guide? Remember, the sayings of Jesus are the word of the Father. Mark how Jesus says, "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." I tremble as I see in this day such a trifling with the Word of God; such a haste to criticise this and question that. There are degrees of inspiration, so we are told; and if that be so, we can be sure of nothing, since we have first to decide some subtle question as to the measure of the inspiration. As well have no Bible as such a Bible. Brethren, the Word of the Lord shall have no such treatment from me, and I trust it will not be so served by any of you, for if so, you will rob yourselves of comfort, and offer grievous disrespect to your divine Lord. I hope we can declare concerning all his sayings,—"Thy word was found, and I did eat it, and it was unto me as my necessary food." More to be desired are these sayings than gold, yea, than much fine gold: they are sweeter also than honey, and the honeycomb. Did a saying come from Christ? Has Jesus set forth a truth in these Scriptures? Then it is not ours to judge, not ours to doubt; but ours to accept with implicit faith. The authority of Jesus stands to us in the stead of reasoning. We so reverence him that we reverence his sayings as being truth itself.

To keep his sayings means, further, *to make careful storage of them in the memory.* To keep these sayings must mean to lay them up in the heart. The blessed Virgin "kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart," and so doth every Christian. "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." It is a blessed thing when we are not content to hear God's Word on the Sabbath, but

listen to its echoes every day in the week. We constantly chew the cud by meditation, and so we are nourished. We delight to know the meaning of the Word by keeping it continually before our minds. We keep the heavenly object long before the sensitive plate of our mind till it is perfectly photographed thereon, and we ourselves are changed by it from glory to glory as by the image of the Lord. Oh, brethren, unless we reverence the Word, and hoard it up as the choicest of treasures, we have no proof that we love Christ.

Further than this, to keep Christ's sayings must mean that, having learned them and retained them in the memory, we also further keep them in the mind by *frequent contemplation.* There is a great failure in this respect, I am afraid, among many professors; but those who fervently love Jesus, and are sanctified to his service, delight to be much engaged in meditating upon the sayings of Jesus. Our earthly cares are our burden, but our heavenly thoughts are our rest. What are human sciences but glimpses at transient and shadowy things? But spiritual meditation yields us views of eternal and substantial truth. As I walk through my house and rejoice in the comforts of my home, I say to myself, "These are only mine for a little while. God has prolonged my life hitherto, but at any moment these visible things may melt away, and I may be where things are real, though they are now invisible." Everything that has to do with this world is a vain show; but as for the world to come, he that hath a possession therein hath true riches. Should not our thoughts go most after that which is most? Should we not give the best of our consideration to that which is best? the most of our time to that which is not of time, but of eternity? I am sure he that loves Jesus delights to think upon the choice words which fell from his lips. We sit down under his shadow, for he is to us the tree of life, and not a single leaf of his shall wither, nor the least of his sayings fall to the ground.

Still, I have no doubt that the main meaning of keeping Christ's sayings is found in *obeying him.* Dear friends, I do not want to say anything that will be severe, but yet I shall put to you a question which ought to alarm many professors. Did you ever spend a whole day from morning to night in distinctly and resolutely doing that which would honour Christ? I do not mean did you give up your business? did you quit your family? such strange conduct would not honour Jesus, but would do the reverse. But have you day after day thought and acted as if Jesus were your master, and you his servant? Is it habitual with you to say, "I will only do that which Christ would do if he were in my place? His example shall be my law. I will not be ruled by the hope of personal advantage or selfish comfort; but to me the supreme rule shall be,—What would Jesus do? What would Jesus have me to do?" I am afraid certain professors fancy that to hold a sound creed, and to attend a faithful ministry, and to subscribe now and then to charitable objects, is about the whole of religion. But you utterly miss the mark if you judge such matters to be the chief items of godliness. The chief matter is so to love Christ that we live for him, and honour him by obedience to him. We cannot serve Christ by following out our own whims. He who follows his own vagaries is a vagrant; only he who obeys Jesus is his follower. By doing what Jesus

bids us, by catching his Spirit, by seeing things in his way of seeing them, and by acting both towards man and towards God in his way of acting, we may make men see what a glorious Saviour we have. We ought so to display the sweet fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives that men may be filled with admiration of our Lord. May God help us to do this; for if we do not keep our Lord's sayings by our holy living, we have no proof that we love Christ; and if we do not love him, then we are not his disciples.

I beg you, my fellow brethren, to apply this text to yourselves. Is the Lord Jesus reverenced by you as your teacher? Do you bow before the authority of his Word? Do you turn to the Bible and say of it,—

> "This is the judge that ends the strife,
> Where wit and reason fail"?

Have you subjected your intellect to his teaching? The loose thinkers of the present day imagine that they may believe what they like, and think what they please. But it is not so. They do as good as say, "Our minds are our own, God shall never rule over us." But this becometh not a saint. Our Lord Jesus will be King of our entire nature, or of none of it. I claim the province of the understanding for my Lord; for it is a part of his empire which he will not leave in the hand of the enemy. We are as responsible for our belief as for our acts. We are never in full subordination to our Lord till we yield ourselves devoutly and reverently to his instruction, calling him Master and Lord, because so he is! Brethren, do you yield your whole lives to Jesus? Do you aim at perfect obedience? Do you repent your failures? Do you cry to him daily, "My Master, mould me to thy will, for to bear thine image is my ambition. I would re-live thy life, and be thy representative on earth, even as thou art my representative in heaven. Oh, that I could say of thy Father and my Father, 'I do always the things which please him'"?

II. So far for the test of discipleship. Now, in the second place, I beg you to follow me while I speak for a minute or two upon THE NEEDS OF A TRUE BELIEVER.

The believer, though he loves his Lord truly is, nevertheless, a most necessitous person, and sadly full of wants. He does not need any better gospel: the Lord Jesus Christ taught us the best gospel that could be; and, indeed, there can be no other. When Paul spoke of "another gospel," he added, "which is not another; but there be some that trouble you." We desire nothing wiser, fuller, or better, than the doctrine which our Lord once delivered to the saints. I heard of a mother speaking to her boy the other day words of truth and soberness. Her hopeful and eager son was tempted to run after certain novelties of doctrine and practice, and she said to him, "What we have heard from our minister is enough for me, for it is according to Scripture. Your father and mother have lived on this gospel, and it has helped them through a thousand troubles, even to this day; and your dear old grandfather and grandmother lived on the same truth, and died upon it triumphantly; therefore, hold fast by it. We have tried it and proved it, therefore do not depart from it." That was common-sense talk. I am afraid of the new gospel; I have not proved it; but what I have

seen of its results in others makes me tremble. Let those who will go to sea in ships of reed or of card-board, heart-of-oak suffices for me. Such vessels have carried men to the ends of the world and home again for many years, and in these alone will I cross the ocean. Those who seek after the novelties of this conceited century seek to push their Lord from his place, that a philosopher may fill his throne. They seem to say, "Stand thou back, thou Galilean! Thou wast good enough for the dark ages, but we need a brighter light for these brighter times." I return to what I said before,—we need no better gospel than that which God himself has set forth in the person of his Son Jesus Christ.

These disciples to whom our Lord spake did not need any better preacher: they could not imagine a better. "Never man spake like this man." What power and authority there was in him, and what an unction of the Holy One was upon him. I cannot say that of you; for you, beloved friends, might often sigh for an abler preacher, and it may be that in some places where you live your Sabbaths are a bondage to you, because the pure gospel is not declared, and the sheep are not fed. But in the case of these apostles, they could not have had a better preacher; and yet, for all that, because the Holy Spirit was not yet fully given, and was not dwelling in them, they had really learned very little. You see the Lord Jesus Christ says of himself, "These things have I *spoken* unto you." He does not say that he had actually *taught* them. The last words of my text are, "All things whatsoever I have *said* unto you." All that Jesus had done, if we view him merely as a preacher, was to speak and to say; but he could not teach the heart apart from the Holy Ghost. Between Christ on earth and his disciples what a distance there was! In his condescension he came very near to them; but yet you always perceive a gulf between the wise Master and the foolish disciples. Now the Holy Ghost annihilates that distance by dwelling in us.

The best instructed of the apostles failed to understand his Lord while he merely spake to them. Often the disciples ran away with the words which he had uttered, and dwelt upon their letter, altogether missing their spiritual meaning. Frequently when they obtained a glimpse of the spiritual meaning, they beclouded it with some prejudice or tradition of their own, which, like smoke, obscured their vision. As to memory, they displayed but little of that faculty towards spiritual things; they were constantly forgetting what the Lord had told them, and acting in a manner directly the opposite of his precept and example. Externally, all was provided, outward ministries of the noblest order were vouchsafed; but they needed something within them; an inward and effectual teacher, a secret and powerful remembrancer. Yea, more, they required to be caused to enjoy what they knew and remembered; they needed the Comforter to extract for them the honey of consolation from the honeycomb of doctrine. Their Lord had taught them all manner of comfortable truths, and yet he had to say to them, "Let not your heart be troubled." He had supplied them with the best arguments for courage, and yet they were afraid. They required a helper who would make them understand the truth, remember the truth, and enjoy the truth; and this is just what you and I stand in need of every hour; for we may sit under the most edifying preacher and remain unedified if we look to his words only. We may hear the best doctrine and yet be unable to get at

it so as to receive it and feel the power of it. Truth without the Spirit of God profiteth not the soul.

Even if you understand you may forget. I dare say you have often to lament that the good word slips away from you, and this is a great evil. Why do we forget? Is it not largely through ignorance and want of understanding? When a child does not understand his lesson he soon forgets it. He who does not obtain a clear view of the truth will fail to remember it, just as you soon forget a person whom you have only seen casually for a few moments, and in a dim light. We cannot easily hold in the memory that which we have not firmly grasped with the mind. Again, we forget heavenly things because we are so occupied with worldly things: our cares, our joys, our pleasures, our pursuits often crowd the things of God into a corner, and even tread them down with heedless fury. We forget our eternal prospects because we are thinking of our immediate interests. Our circumstances compel us to think of lower objects, but we need divine help to abide in communion with the higher matters. We need some one to bring these things to our remembrance, and to elevate us to a superior region of mind and heart.

At times we forget our Lord's sayings, and become bewildered by many afflictions. Trouble follows trouble: we go from darkness to deeper darkness in our experience, and we are so worried that we forget. When we most need the promise we are most apt to forget it. There are good solid steps all through the Slough of Despond; but when a man is passing through that horrible place he is usually so hurried and confused that he cannot see the stepping-stones, but slips into the deep mire where there is no standing. It is ill for us to be in a storm and our anchor at home. The promise is admired when we do not require it; but how often is it forgotten when it would be of the utmost service. We need a prompter, a friend out of sight to suggest the proper word, or else we blunder and flounder, and do not act our parts aright. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to refresh our memories.

Sometimes, I am afraid, our memories fail us because we are not particularly anxious to recollect. Certain precepts are so contrary to the carnal mind that if we can forget them we are sure to do so. You know how easy it is in your family reading to omit parts of God's word which are too close and personal. We are afraid of the razor which cuts too close to the skin. Have you not felt of a morning when your servants have been gathered together, that you could not well read a certain passage because you had been out of temper, or unkind, or in some other way out of proper form? You feared that they would say, "Our master and the Bible do not agree." In your own private thoughts a precept occurs to you, but you feel it convenient to ignore it because it would stand in the way of a design which you are cherishing. You intend to go through with your purpose, and therefore you shut your eyes to an inconvenient text. But if we are under the guidance of the Spirit of God, he will bring to our remembrance the duty in its proper time, and we shall bring forth our fruit in its season. It is extremely easy to be wise after folly, and to be calm after the danger is over. We find the candle when the night is ended. We cry, "Dear me, if I had felt yesterday what I feel to-day, how differently I would have acted." We are so often a

little behind the market. We lock the door after the horse is stolen. Fruit out of season is always deficient in flavour; never are the scent and the taste so perfect as in the middle of the season. Oh, that we may bring forth our fruit in its due season,—patience in tribulation, courage in danger, holiness in life, and hope in death. We fail to do this because that evil nature which is in us makes us forget at the precise moment what we ought to remember. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to bring before us the sayings of Christ in their due order and time. Do you not need this?

III. Hoping to retain your prayerful attention, I proceed to notice, THE PRIVILEGE OF THE TRUE BELIEVER. It is the true disciple's privilege to possess in the Holy Spirit a private tutor, a prompter, and a Comforter.

The Lord Jesus says, "The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things." Christ in his sayings gave us our class-book, complete and infallible; but through our dulness we need more. That young man has gone to college: he has with him all necessary books, and in them is to be found all that he will need to learn; even thus the Lord Jesus has given us in his sayings all that we need to know. But the young man's father wishes him to become a learned man, and therefore he engages for him a private tutor, who will teach him what the books contain. With his tutor's help his book is of far greater use to him than before. If any passage is difficult the tutor explains it; he puts the youth into the way of reading his class-books, so as to get the full value of them. Spiritually this is the office of the Holy Ghost: he finds us the key wherewith to open up the mystery which else would be out of our reach.

He really teaches us. To *teach* you is a very different thing from speaking to you. A person may speak to a company of young people, and yet teach them nothing. If I am anxious to instruct a brother on any point, I do not merely speak to him, but I go over the ground carefully, set out each point distinctly, repeat my statements deliberately, and illustrate them appropriately. The Spirit of God, when he takes the child of God out of the company, and speaks privately to his heart, goes over the truth with him till it is made clear, and happily apprehended. We need to have truth opened up to the understanding, impressed upon the heart, made real to the apprehension, applied to the mind, wrought into the affections, and endeared to the soul. It is one thing to hear the Word, but it is another thing to learn the Word: it is one thing to be told, but quite another thing to be taught.

The Spirit teaches the saints, either at once or by degrees, all the truth of Christ. Some parts of that whole you will never learn, except upon a sick bed, or in deep depression of spirit, or in bereavement and adversity; while other truths will only be learned on the bright mountains of assurance and communion with God. It is the Spirit's province to burn truth into the soul, to engrave it upon the renewed heart, and make the mind sure and certain as to what it knows. No knowledge is so sure as that which the Holy Spirit communicates to our spirit. Inward teaching is effectual teaching. A man taught of God knows, and cannot be made to question what he knows. Time was, whenever I heard a sceptical remark, I felt wounded and somewhat shaken. I am no

longer shaken by these wandering winds. There are certain things of which I am as sure as of my own existence; I have seen, tasted, and handled them, and I am past being argued out of them by those who know nothing about them. I am a lost man if the old, old gospel is not true; there is no way of salvation for me if it be not of grace through faith in the atoning sacrifice; and as I know that I am not lost, but am surely a saved man, I know that the Word which has saved me is the truth of God. Those who are familiar with spiritual realities defy denial: they set their inward consciousness against ten thousand scepticisms; if they cannot convince others, they are convinced themselves. We must be taught by the Spirit of God in a secret, personal, unquestionable, effectual manner. We must be made to feel the power of the truth by a spiritual inoculation with it, so that it enters into our very life, and becomes part and parcel of ourselves.

It is promised us that the Comforter will teach us *all things*—that is, all the things which Jesus said and did. Have we realized this far-reaching privilege? There is a great variety in the knowledge of Christ. Nobody need think that he will exhaust it. There is, moreover, a proportion in the things of Christ, and we need to know all that our Lord has set forth. Jesus does not teach doctrine only, though some professors crave doctrine, and doctrine alone. Jesus does not teach all practice: he teaches practice wondrously, but he also declares doctrine. Our Lord does not teach either doctrine or practice without experience, but he makes a perfect blend to our edification. The way with some of God's people is either to have nothing but doctrine, or else nothing but practice, or else nothing but experience, and this warps and spoils them. Give yourself up to the Spirit of God, and he will teach you all things: here a little, and there a little,—here a little of what you should know, there a little of what you should feel, and then again a little of what you should do.

Do remember that especially in the doing part of it the Spirit of God must be your teacher. A lad is put apprentice to a handicraft. How does he learn it? Why, by seeing how his master does it, and by doing it himself. At first he spoils the material, and his master needs to have much patience with him; but at last practice makes perfect, and the apprentice becomes a journeyman. The Spirit of God with wonderful condescension puts us to practise a little patience. We soon get weary of that task. Then he gives us an opportunity of producing love—love to some poor wretched waif on life's rough sea. We are apt to grow chilled by his ingratitude, and wearied with our non-success. The Holy Spirit drills us in heavenly marching till we keep step with our Lord, and men take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and have learned of him.

Brethren, you are to keep your Lord's sayings and never go beyond them; but to do this will need the private tuition of the Holy Ghost, and you must not be satisfied unless he wakeneth you morning by morning, and openeth your ear to hear what he hath to say, bringing home to your heart and conscience the things that make you wise unto salvation.

As we need something beside this, it is a mercy that we have it. We require that our memories be strengthened. What wretched memories we have as to divine things. As I have already said, we recollect when

it is too late, and thus our memories serve rather to minister to our regret than to our improvement. It should not be so, and if we will put ourselves under the teaching of the Spirit of God it shall not remain so; he will strengthen our memories spiritually. He often brings truth to our minds; do you not find it so? While you are sitting here this morning flashes of light have been around you. Branch roads have opened up as we have proceeded; vistas of truth have rejoiced your vision. You have cried with wonder, "I never saw that before!" That is the Spirit of God. Frequently a doctrine comes home to you with the force of a new discovery; you had heard the truth before, but you had never seen it; but the Spirit brings it to your remembrance with singular vivacity and force.

He refreshes the mind by vivid recollections. He refreshes the heart by melting gratitude. I have known times when my memory of the love of Christ has made me sit down and weep for very joy. Oh, what gratitude wells up in the heart when the Holy Spirit brings all that Christ did to remembrance, and we hear him say from his cross, "I did all this for thee, what hast thou done for me?" It is the Spirit's work to refresh the memory of the heart as well as the memory of the mind. Ofttimes he refreshes the memory of the conscience—not quite so pleasant an operation. I have been doing for years wrong things without knowing them to be wrong. I have been neglecting a manifest duty for a long time, but all of a sudden that duty has been brought to my remembrance as one of the things which Jesus told me. I bless the Holy Ghost for thus sanctifying me by giving me a higher standard of holiness, and making me more particular about things which I glossed over with but slight attention. This is a part of the work of the Holy Spirit of God, to bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever he hath told you.

I am sure the Spirit of God often blesses us by bringing things to the memory of our hope. Perhaps this is an odd way of putting it; for how can hope have a memory? But I mean this, that hope seems to forget that the Lord hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Hope seems to forget that

> "There is a land of pure delight,
> Where saints immortal reign."

And sometimes the Spirit of God brings all that glorious revelation of the world to come before our minds. Have you never felt glory begun below? Have not the pearly gates seemed to stand, not ajar, but wide open, and have you not in spirit walked adown the streets of gold, and worn your crown, and cast it at your Saviour's feet? Then you have said to yourself, "I can bear this pain, I can put up with these depressions and these inconveniences, for I know that there is laid up for me in heaven a crown of life that fadeth not away." The Spirit of God thus brings all things to our remembrance.

I shall say no more, but pray the Spirit of God to come upon you this very day, and bring to your remembrance all things that Christ has ever said to you. There will be a mixture of sunny memories and sorrowing memories; but they will be blessed memories, all of them. I thought when I was trying to prepare a subject for this morning, "All

that I have preached for these many years is taken from me and printed, so that I cannot repeat it,—what shall I do?" and then this truth came to me, "He shall teach you"; "He shall teach you," and I begged him to teach *me* that I might teach *you*. I thought, "Alas, I have had many bright and sparkling thoughts at times, but they do not come just now." I sat still waiting, and then the fact came to me that the Holy Ghost would bring all things to my remembrance whatsoever the Lord Jesus had said. I find my natural memory to be less powerful than it used to be in the days of my youth: shall I, therefore, be allowed to forget when I am teaching? No, "He shall teach you, and bring all things to your remembrance." How beautiful! I have noticed old people whose memories have been sadly feeble. I knew one who forgot his children. But I never knew an old saint yet who forgot the name of the Saviour, or failed to remember his love. Sometimes the Holy Ghost bears such witness in the heart that the memory is very strong about divine things even when it fails about spiritual things. So, my dear old friend, you that the youngsters sometimes amuse themselves with because your memory has got to be like an old sieve that lets everything through; it will not let your Lord through, you will always feel the music of his name. You will never forget your Well-Beloved if you live to be as old as Methuselah. Memory, though it leaves no other name, shall leave that name recorded there. Christ's love is not hung upon us like a garland on a tree, but it is cut into us, and as the tree grows the letters grow deeper and broader every day. The Holy Ghost, who is the life of believers, writes more and more clearly upon that life the glorious and blessed name of Jesus. I wish that any here who do not know Christ would cry for the Spirit of God to teach him to them. If you long to be saved, pray that by his Spirit the Lord Jesus may bring you into the bond of the covenant, for his love's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xiv. 15—31; xvi. 1—14.

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A QUESTION FOR A QUESTIONER.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MAY 31ST, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"—Psalm lxxvii. 9.

ASAPH was very grievously troubled in spirit. The deep waters were not only around his barque, but they had come in even unto his soul. When the spirit of a man is wounded, then is he wounded indeed; and such was the case with this man of God. In the time of his trouble he was attacked with doubts and fears; so that he was made to question the very foundations of things. Had he not taken to continual prayer he had perished in his affliction; but he cried unto God with his voice, and the Lord gave ear unto him. Nor did he only pray, but he used the fittest means for escaping from his despondency. Very wisely this good man argued with himself, and sought to cure his unbelief. He treated himself homœopathically, meeting like with like. As he was attacked by the disease of questioning, he gave himself questions as a medicine. Observe how he kills one question with another, as men fight fire with fire. Here we have six questions, one after another, each one striking at the very heart of unbelief. "Will the Lord cast off for ever? Will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?" If questions are raised at all let us go through with them; and as the Saviour answered one question of his opponents by another, so may we also silence the questions of unbelief by further questions which shall strip our doubt of all disguises.

The question which makes our text is meant to end other questions. You may carry truth as far as ever you like, and it will always be truth. Truth is like those crystals which, when split up into the smallest possible fragments, still retain their natural form. You may break truth in pieces, you may do what you like with it, and it is truth throughout; but error is diverse within itself, and evermore bears its own death within itself. You can see its falsehood even in its own light. Bring it forward, strip it of its disguises, behold it in its naked form, and its deformity at once appears. Carry unbelief to its proper consequences, and you

will revolt from it, and be driven by the grace of God to faith. Sometimes our doubts assume appearances which are not their own, and so are hard to deal with; but if we make them take their own natural shapes, we shall easily destroy them. The question before us is what the logician would call a *reductio ad absurdum;* it reduces doubt to an absurdity; it puts into plain and truthful words the thought of an unbelieving mind, and at once it is seen to be a horrible notion. "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?" One might smile while reading a suggestion so absurd, and yet there is grave cause for trembling in the profanity of such a question. "Hath God forgotten?" We stumble at the first word. How can God forget? "Hath God forgotten to be?" We snap the question at that point, and it is blasphemous. It is no better when we give it as a whole,—"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" The bare idea is both ridiculous and blasphemous. Again, I say, it is wise when we are vexed with evil questioning to put down the questions in black and white, and expose them to the daylight. Drive the wretched things out of their holes; hunt them in the open; and they will soon be destroyed. Let the light of God into the dark cellar of your despondency, and you will soon quit the den in sheer disgust at your own folly. Make a thought appear to be absurd and you have gone a long way towards conquering it.

The question now before us is one of very wide application. I shall not attempt to suggest all the ways in which it may be employed, but I am going to turn it to three uses this morning. The first is for *the man of God in distress.* Let him take this question, and put it to his own reason and common sense, and especially to his own faith, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" When we have handled the question in that way, we will pass it over to *the seeking sinner who is despondent,* and we will ask him whether he really believes that God hath forgotten to be gracious. When this is done, we may have a moment or two left for *the Christian worker who is dispirited,* who cannot do his work as he would wish to do, and who mourns over the little result coming from it. "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Will you be allowed to go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and will you never come again rejoicing, bringing your sheaves with you? We shall have quite enough matter to fill up our time, and many fragments remaining when the feast is over. May God the Holy Spirit bless the word!

I. To the man of God in distress, this question is commended, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

What kind of distress is that which suggests such a question? Where had Asaph been? In what darkness had he wandered? In what tangled wood had he lost himself? How came he to get such a thought into his mind?

I answer, first, this good man had been troubled by unanswered prayers. "In the day of my trouble," he says,—"In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord"; and he seems to say that though he sought the Lord his griefs were not removed. He was burdened, and he cried unto God beneath the burden, but the burden was not lightened. He was in darkness, and he craved for light, but not a star shone forth. Nothing is more grievous to the sincere pleader than to feel that his petitions are not heeded by his God. It is a sad business to have gone

up, like Elijah's servant, seven times, and yet to have seen no cloud upon the sky in answer to your importunity. It tries a man to spend all night in wrestling, and to have won no blessing from the covenant angel. To ask, and not to receive; to seek, and not to find; to knock, and to see no open door,—these are serious trials to the heart, and tend to extort the question, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Unanswered prayer is very staggering even to strong faith; but the weak faith of a tried believer is hard put to it by long delays and threatened denials. When the mercy-seat itself ceases to yield us aid, what can we do? You will not wonder, then, considering your own tendency to doubt, that this man of God, when his prayers did not bring him deliverance, cried out, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Besides that, he was enduring continued suffering. Our text says, "My sore ran in the night." His wound was bleeding ever: there was no cessation to his pain. At night he woke up and wished it were morning, and when the daylight came he wished for night again, if, perchance, he might obtain relief; but none came. Pain of body, when it is continuous and severe, is exceedingly trying to our feeble spirits; but agony of soul is worse still. Give me the rack sooner than despair. Do you know what it is to have a keen thought working like an auger into your brain? Has Satan seemed to pierce and gimlet your mind with a sharp, cutting thought that would not be put aside? It is torment indeed to have a worm gnawing at your heart, a fire consuming your spirit: yet a true child of God may be thus tormented. When Asaph had prayed for relief, and the relief did not come, the temptation came to him to ask, "Am I always to suffer? Will the Lord never relieve me? It is written, 'He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds'; has he ceased from that sacred surgery? 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious?'"

In addition to this, the man of God was in a state of mind in which his depression had become inveterate. He says, "My soul refused to be comforted." Many plasters were at hand, but he could not lay them upon the wound; many cordials offered themselves, but he could not receive them—his throat seemed closed. The meadows were green, but the gate was nailed up, and the sheep could not get in; the brooks flowed softly, but he could not reach their margin to lie down and drink. Asaph was lying at the pool of Bethesda, and he saw others step in to be healed, but he had no man to put him into the pool when the waters were troubled. His mind had become confirmed in its despondency, and his soul refused to be comforted.

More than that, there seemed to be a failure of the means of grace for him. "I remembered God, and was troubled." Some of God's people go up to the house of the Lord where they were accustomed to unite in worship with delight, but they have no delight now; they even go to the communion-table, and eat the bread and drink the wine, but they do not receive the body and blood of Christ to the joy of their faith. Anon they get them to their chambers, and open their Bibles, and bow their knees, and remember God; but every verse seems to condemn them; their prayers accuse them, and God himself seems turned to be their enemy; and then it is little wonder that unbelief exclaims, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

At the back of all this there was another trouble for Asaph, namely, that he could not sleep. He says, "Thou holdest mine eyes waking." It seemed as if the Lord himself held up his eyelids, and would not let them close in sleep. Others on their beds were refreshed with "kind nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep"; but when Asaph sought his couch he was more unrestful there than when he was engaged in the business of the day. We may speak of sleeplessness very lightly, but among afflictions it is one of the worst that can happen to men. When the chamber of repose becomes a furnace of anguish it goes hard with a man. When the Psalmist could not find even a transient respite in sleep, his weakness and misery drove him to say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Moreover, there was one thing more: he lost the faculty of telling out his grief: "I am so troubled that I cannot speak." There are some people to whom we would not tell our trouble, for we know they could not understand it, for they have never been in deep waters themselves; there are others to whom we could not tell our trouble, though they might help us, because we feel ashamed to do so. To be compelled to silence is a terrible increase to anguish: the torrent is swollen when its free course is prevented. A dumb sorrow is sorrow indeed. The grief that can talk will soon pass away; that misery which is wordless is endless. The brook that ripples and prattles as it flows is shallow; but deep waters are silent in their flow. When a man falls under the power of a dumb spirit it needs Christ himself to come and cast the devil out of him, for he is brought into a very grievous captivity. We who know what a poor thing human nature is when it is brought into affliction, are not surprised that the man of God said in such a case, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Having thus, you see, put the doubt in the most apologetic style, and mentioned the excuses which might mitigate the sin of the question, I am now going to expose its unreasonableness and sinfulness, by considering *what answers we may give to such a question?* I shall endeavour to answer it by making it answer itself—

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Answer: Hath God forgotten anything? If he could forget, could he be God? Is it not absurd to speak of him as short of memory, of whose understanding there is no searching? Shall we speak of him as forgetting, when to his mind all things are present, and the past and the future are ever before him as in a map which lies open before the beholder's eye? Oh child of God, why dost thou talk thus? Oh troubled heart, wilt thou insult thy God, wilt thou narrow the infinity of his mind? Can God forget? Thou art forgetful. Perhaps thou canst scarce remember from hour to hour thine own words and thine own promises; but is the Lord such an one as thou art? Not even the least thing is passed over by him. He hath not forgotten the young ravens in their nests, but he heareth when they cry. He hath not forgotten a single blade of grass, but giveth to each its own drop of dew. He hath not forgotten the sea monsters down deep in the caverns of ocean. He hath not forgotten a worm that hides itself away beneath the sod; therefore banish the thought once for all, that thy God hath forgotten anything, much less that he hath forgotten to be gracious.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Then hath he forgotten an old, long, ancient, aye, eternal habit of his heart. Hast thou not heard that his mercy endureth for ever? Did he not light up the lamps of heaven because of his mercy? Do we not sing, "To him that made great lights: for his mercy endureth for ever. The sun to rule by day, and the moon and stars to rule by night: for his mercy endureth for ever"? Since the creation hath he not in providence always been gracious? Is it not his rule to open his hand, and supply the want of every living thing? Did he not give his Son to redeem mankind? Hath he not sent his Spirit to turn men from darkness to light? After having been gracious all these myriads of ages, after having manifested his love and his grace at such a costly rate, hath he forgotten it? Thou, O man, takest up a practice, and thou layest it down; thou doest a thing now and then, and then thou ceasest from thy way, but shall the eternal God who has always been gracious forget to be gracious? Oh, Lord, forgive the thought.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Why, then, he must have forgotten his purpose! Hast thou not heard that or ever the earth was he purposed to redeem unto himself a people who should be his own chosen, his children, his peculiar treasure, a people near unto him? Before he made the heavens and the earth, had he not planned in his own mind that he would manifest the fulness of his grace toward his people in Christ Jesus, and dost thou think that he has turned from his eternal purpose, and rent up his divine decrees, and burned the book of life, and changed the whole course of his operations among the sons of men? Dost thou know what thou art at to talk so? Doth he not say, "I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed"? Hath he said, and will he not do it? Hath he purposed, and shall it not come to pass? Banish, then, the thought of his forgetting to be gracious.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Then he must have forforgotten his own *covenant;* for what was the purport of his covenant with Jesus Christ, the second Adam, on the behalf of his people? Is it not called a covenant of grace? Is not grace the spirit and tenor and object of it? Of old he said, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy"; and in his covenant he ordains to show this grace to as many as are in Christ Jesus. Now, if a man's covenant be confirmed it stands fast. Nothing that occurs after a covenant has been made can alter it; and God having once made a covenant turneth not from his promise and his oath. The law which was four hundred and thirty years after the covenant made with Abraham could not change the promises which the Lord had made to the believing seed, neither can any accident or unforeseen circumstance make the covenant of grace null and void; indeed, there are no accidents with God, nor any unforeseen circumstances with him. He hath lifted his hand to heaven and hath sworn; he hath declared, "If my covenant be not with day and night, then will I cast away the seed of Jacob." The Lord hath not forgotten his covenant with day and night, neither will he cast off his believing people. He cannot, therefore, forget to be gracious.

More than that, when thou sayest, "Has God forgotten to be gracious?" dost thou not forget that in such a case he must have

forgotten *his own glory?* for the main of his glory lies in his grace. In that which he does out of free favour and love to undeserving, ill-deserving, hell-deserving men, he displays the meridian splendour of his glory. His power, his wisdom, and his immutability praise him; but in the forefront of all shines out his grace. This is his darling attribute; by this he is illustrious on earth and in heaven above. Hath God forgotten his own glory? Doth a man forget his honour? Doth a man turn aside from his own name and fame? He may do so in a moment of madness; but the thrice holy God hath not forgotten the glory of his name, nor forgotten to be gracious.

Listen, and let unbelief stand rebuked. If God hath forgotten to be gracious, then he must have forgotten *his own Son*, he must have forgotten Calvary and the expiatory sacrifice offered there; he must have forgotten him that is ever with him at his right hand, making intercession for transgressors; he must have forgotten his pledge to him that he shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied. Canst thou conceive that? It is verging upon blasphemy to suppose such a thing; yet it must be that he has forgotten his own Son if he hath forgotten to be gracious.

Once more; if this were the case, the Lord must have forgotten *his own self;* for grace is of the essence of his nature, since God is love. *We* forget ourselves and disgrace ourselves, but God cannot do so. Oh beloved, it is part and parcel of God's own nature that he should show mercy to the guilty and be gracious to those who trust in him. Hast thou forgotten as a father thy children? Can a woman forget her sucking child that she should not have compassion upon the son of her womb? These things are barely possible, but it is utterly impossible that the great Father should forget himself by forgetting his children; that the great Lord who hath taken us to be his peculiar heritage and his jewels should cease to value us and forget to be gracious to us.

I think I hear some one say, "I do not think God hath forgotten to be gracious *except to me.*" Doth God make any exceptions? Doth he not speak universally when he addresses his children? Remember, if God forgot to be gracious to one of his believing people he might forget to be gracious to them all. If there were one instance found in which his love failed, then the foundations would be removed, and what could the righteous do? The Good Shepherd doth not preserve some of his sheep, but all of them; and it is not concerning the strong ones of his flock that he saith, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish;" but he has said it of all the sheep, aye, and of the smallest lamb of all the flock, of the most scabbed and wounded, of all that he has purchased with his blood. The Lord hath not forgotten himself in any one instance; but he is faithful to all believers.

Now, let us attend to *the amendment of the question.* Shall I tell thee, friend, thou who hast put this question, what the true question is which thou oughtest to ask thyself? It is not, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" but "Hast thou forgotten to be grateful?" Why, thou enjoyest many mercies even now. It is grace which allows thee to live after having asked such a vile question. Grace is all around thee, if thou wilt but open thine eyes, or thine ears. Thou hadst not been spared after so much sin if God had forgotten to be gracious.

Listen: Hast thou not forgotten to be believing? God's word is true, why dost thou doubt it? Is he a liar? Has he ever played thee false? Which promise of his has failed? Time was when thou didst trust him; then thou knewest he was gracious; but thou art doubting now without just cause; thou art permitting an evil heart of unbelief to draw thee aside from the living God. Know this, and repent of it, and trust thy best Friend.

Hast thou not also forgotten to be reverent? Else how couldst thou ask such a question? Should a man say of God that he has forgotten to be gracious? Should he imagine such a thing? Should the keenest grief drive to such profanity? Shall a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Shall anyone of us begin to doubt that grace, which has kept us out of the bottomless pit, and spared us to this hour? Oh, heir of glory, favoured as thou hast been to bathe thy forehead in the sunlight of heaven full often, and then to lean thy head on the Saviour's bosom,—is it out of thy mouth that this question comes,—"Hath God forgotten to be gracious"? Call it back and bow thine head unto the dust, and say, "My Lord, have mercy upon thy servant, that he hath even thought thus for an instant."

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Why, surely thou hast forgotten thyself, or thou wouldest not talk so: thou hast forgotten that thou owest everything to thy Lord, and art indebted to him even for the breath in thy nostrils. Thou hast forgotten the precious blood of Jesus; thou hast forgotten the mercy-seat; thou hast forgotten providence; thou hast forgotten the Holy Spirit; thou hast forgotten all that the Lord has done for thee: surely, thou hast forgotten all good things, or thou wouldest not speak thus. Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and leave the dunghill of thy despair, and sing, "His mercy endureth for ever." Say in thy soul,—"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Thus much to the child of God. May the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, apply it to every troubled heart.

II. Furthermore, I desire to talk a little with THE SEEKING SINNER IN DESPONDENCY. You have not yet found joy and peace through believing, and therefore I will first *describe your case*, and what it is that has made you say, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

You labour under a sense of guilt; you know that you have transgressed against God, and you feel that this is a terrible thing, involving wrath to the uttermost. The arrows of God are sticking in your soul, and rankling there. You cannot trifle with sin as you once did; it burns like a fiery poison in your veins! You have been praying to get rid of that sense of sin, but it deepens. The case I am stating is very clear to every child of God; but it is not at all clear to the man who is enduring it. He cries, "The more I pray, the more I go to hear the word, the more I read the Bible, the blacker sinner I seem to be. 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious?'"

Moreover, a sense of weakness is increasing upon you. You thought that you could pray; but now you cannot pray. You thought it the easiest thing in the world to believe; but now the grappling-irons will not lay hold upon the promise, and you find no rest. You cannot now perform those holy acts which you once thought to be so easy. Your power

is dried up, your glory is withered. Now you groan out, "I would but I can't repent, then all would easy be. Alas, I have no hope, no strength; I am reduced to utter weakness." *We* understand all this, but you do not; and we do not wonder at your crying,—"Hath God forgotten to be gracious." "Oh, but sir, I have been crying to God that he would be pleased to deliver me from sin, and the more I try to be holy the more I am tempted; I never knew such horrible thoughts before, nor discovered such filthiness in my nature before. When I get up in the morning I resolve that I will go straight all the day, and before long I am more crooked than ever. I feel worse rather than better. The world tempts me, the devil tempts me, the flesh tempts me, everything goes wrong with me. 'Hath God forgotten to be gracious'? I have prayed the Lord to give me peace, and he promises to give rest; but I am more uneasy than ever, and cannot rest where I used to do. I used to be very happy when I was at chapel on Sunday; I thought I was doing well to be at public worship; but now I fear that I only go as a formalist, and therefore I mock God, and make matters worse. I rested once in being a teetotaller, in being a hard-working, honest, sober man; but now I see that I must be born again. I used to rest once in the idea that I was becoming quite religious; but now it seems to me that my betterness is a hollow sham, and all my old nests are pulled down."

My friend, I perfectly understand your case, and think well of it; for the like has happened to many of us. You must be divorced from self before you can be married to Christ; and that divorce must be made most clear and plain, or Jesus will never make a match with you. You must come clear away from self-righteousness, self-trust, self-hope, or else one of these days, when Jesus has saved you, there might be a doubt as to whether he is to have all the glory, or to go halves with self. He makes you nothing that he may be all in all to you. He grinds you to the dust that he may lift you out of it for ever. Meanwhile, I do not wonder that the question crosses your mind, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

Let me *show how wrong the question is.* "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" If he has, he has forgotten what he used to know right well. David was foul with his adultery—remember that fifty-first Psalm—but how sweet was the prophet's message to the penitent king: "The Lord hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die!" "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow," was a prayer most graciously answered in that royal sinner's case. Remember Jonah, and how he went down to the bottom of the mountains in the whale's belly, and was brought even to hell's door; yet he lived to sing "Salvation is of the Lord," and was brought out of the depths of the sea. Remember Manasseh, who shed innocent blood very much, and yet the grace of God brought him among thorns, and made him a humble servant of the Lord. Remember Peter, how he denied his Master, but his Master forgave him, and bade him feed his sheep. Forget not the dying thief, and how in the extremity of death, filled with all the agonies of crucifixion, he looked to the Lord, and the Lord looked on him, and that day he was with the King in paradise. Think also of Saul of Tarsus, that chief of sinners, who breathed out threatenings against the people of God, and yet was struck down, and, before long,

was in mercy raised up again, and ordained to be a chosen vessel to bear the gospel among the heathen. If God has forgotten to be gracious, he has forgotten a line of things in which he has wrought great wonders, and in which his heart delighted from of old. It cannot be that he will turn away from that which is so dear to him.

"Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Then why are all the old arrangements for grace still standing? There is the mercy-seat; surely that would have been taken away if God had forgotten to be gracious. The gospel is preached to you, and this is its assurance, "Whosoever believeth in him is not condemned." If the Lord had forgotten to be gracious he would not have mocked you with empty words.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself is still living, and still stands as a priest to make intercession for transgressors. Would that be the case if God had forgotten to be gracious? The Holy Spirit is still at work convincing and converting; would that be so if God had forgotten to be gracious? Oh brothers, while Calvary is still a fact, and the Christ has gone into the glory bearing his wounds with him, there is a fountain still filled with blood wherein the guilty may wash. While there is an atoning sacrifice there must be grace for sinners. I cannot enlarge on these points, for time flies so rapidly; but the continuance of the divine arrangements, the continuance of the Son of God as living and pleading, and the mission of the Holy Spirit as striving, regenerating, comforting —all this proves that God hath not forgotten to be gracious.

Remember that God himself must according to nature be ever gracious so long as men will put their trust in the great sacrifice. He has promised to be gracious to all who confess their sins and forsake them, and look to Christ; and he cannot forget that word without a change which we dare not impute to him. God might sooner forget to be than forget to be gracious to those to whom he has promised his grace. He has promised to every poor, guilty, confessing soul that will come and put his trust in Christ that he will be gracious in pardoning sin, and so it must be.

I shall come to close quarters with you. I know your despair has driven you to the question, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" and I would silence it by putting other questions to you. Is it not you that have forgotten to believe in Christ? "I have been praying," says one. That is all very well, but the gospel is, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," not "he that prays." "I have been trying to come to Christ." I know that, but I read nothing about this *trying* in Holy Scripture, and I fear your trying is that which keeps you from Jesus. You are told to believe in Christ, not to try to believe. A minister in America, some time ago, was going up the aisle of his church during a revival, when a young man earnestly cried to him, "Sir, can you tell me the way to Christ?" "No," was the answer, very deliberately given; "I cannot tell you the way to Christ." The young man answered, "I beg pardon; I thought you were a minister of the gospel." "So I am," was the reply. "How is it that you cannot tell me the way to Christ?" "My friend," said the minister, "*there is no way to Christ.* He is himself the way. All that believe in him are justified from all things. There is no way to Christ; Christ is here." O! my hearer, Christ himself is the way of salvation, and that way comes

right down to your foot, and then leads right up to heaven. You have not to make a way to the Way, but at once to run in the way which lies before you. The way begins where you now are; *enter it.* Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ now, and you are saved; and then you will no more ask the question, "Is his mercy clean gone for ever?"

"Oh," says one, "but I have been looking to reform myself and grow better, and I have done a good deal in that way." That is not the gospel; it is all very right and proper, but the gospel is, "He that believeth in him is not condemned." The other day I saw my bees swarming; they hung on a branch of a tree in a living mass; the difficulty was to get them into a hive. My man went with his veil over his face and began to put them into the skep; and I noticed that he was particularly anxious to get the queen bee into it; for if he once had her in the hive the rest would be sure to follow, and remain with her, Now, faith is the queen bee. You may get temperance, love, hope, and all those other bees into the hive; but the main thing is to get simple faith in Christ, and all the rest will come afterwards. Get the queen bee of faith, and all the other virtues will attend her.

"Alas!" cries one, "I have been listening to the gospel for years." That is quite right, for "faith cometh by hearing"; but recollect, we are not saved by mere listening, nor even by knowing, unless we advance to believing. The letter of the word is not life; it is the spirit of it which saves. When tea was first introduced into this country a person favoured a friend with a pound of it. It was exceedingly expensive, and when he met his friend next, he enquired, "Have you tried the tea?" "Yes, but I did not like it at all." "How was that? Everybody else is enraptured with it." "Why," said the other, "we boiled it in a saucepan, threw away the water, and brought the leaves to table; but they were very hard, and nobody cared for them." Thus many people keep the leaves of form, and throw away the spiritual meaning. They listen to our doctrines, but fail to come to Christ. They throw away the true essence of the gospel, which is faith in Jesus. I pray you, do not act thus with what I preach. Do not bury yourself in my words, or even in the words of Scripture; but pass onward to the life and soul of their meaning, which is Christ Jesus, the sinner's hope. All the aroma of the gospel is in Christ; all the essence of the gospel is in Christ, and you have only to trust him to enjoy eternal life. You guilty, worthless sinner, you at the gates of hell, you who have nothing to recommend you, you who have no good works or good feelings, simply trust the merits of Christ, and accept the atonement made by his death, and you shall be saved, your sin shall be forgiven, your nature shall be changed, you shall become a new creature in Christ Jesus, and you shall never say again, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

III. The time has gone; therefore THE DISAPPOINTED WORKER must be content with a few crumbs. You have been working for Christ, dear brother, and have fallen into a very low state of heart, so that you cry, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" I know what state you are in. You say, "I do not feel as if I could preach; the matter does not flow. I do not feel as if I could teach; I search for instruction, and the more I pull the more I cannot get it." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Can he not fill thine empty vessel again?

Can he not give thee stores of thought, emotion, and language? He has used thee; can he not do so again? "Ah, but my friends have gone; I am in a village from which the people remove to London, and I lose my best helpers." Or, perhaps you say, "I work in a back street, and everybody is moving out into the suburbs." You have lost your friends, and they have forgotten you; but, "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" You can succeed so long as the Lord is with you. Be of good courage; your best friend is left. He who made a speech in the Academy found that all his hearers had gone except Plato; but as Plato remained, the orator finished his address. They asked him how he could continue under the circumstances, and he replied that Plato was enough for an audience. So, if God be pleased with you, go on; the divine pleasure is more than sufficient. "The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." Did not Wesley say when he was dying, "The best of all is, God is with us"? Therefore fear not the failure of friends.

"But, sir, the sinners I have to deal with are such tough ones: they reject my testimony; they grow worse instead of better; I do not think I can ever preach to them again." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" *You* cannot save them, but he can. "But I work in such a depraved neighbourhood, the people are sunk in poverty and drunkenness." "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Does not he know the way to save drunkards? Does not he know how to rescue the harlot and the whoremonger, and make them clean and chaste?

"Ah, but the church in which I labour is in a wretched state; the members are worldly, lukewarm, and divided. I have no brethren around me to pray for me, as you have; they are always squabbling and finding fault with one another." That is a horrible business, but "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Cannot God put you right, and your church right? If he begins with you by strengthening your faith, may you not be the means of healing all these divisions, and bringing these poor people into a better state of mind, and then converting the sinners round about you? "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?"

"Ah, well," saith one, "I am ready to give it all up." I hope you will not do so. If you have made up your mind to speak no more in the name of the Lord, I hope that word will be like fire in your bones; for if God has not forgotten to be gracious, provoked as he has been, how can you forget to be patient? Is it possible while God's sun shines on you that you will refuse to shine on the fallen? If God continues to be gracious, you ought not to grow weary in well-doing.

Perhaps I speak to some dear brother who is very old and infirm; he can hardly hear, and scarcely see, so that he reads his Bible with difficulty. He gets to the service now, but he knows that soon he will be confined to his chamber, and then to his bed. His mind is sadly failing him; he is quite a wreck. Take this home with you, my aged brother, and keep it for your comfort if you never come out again: "Hath God forgotten to be gracious?" Oh, no; the Lord hath said, "Even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you." Having loved his own which were in the world, the Lord Jesus loved them unto the end; and he will love *you* to

the end. When the last scene comes, and you close your eyes in death, blessed be his name, you shall know that he has not forgotten you. "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," is the Lord's promise, and his people's sheet-anchor. Therefore, let us not fear when our frail tabernacles are taken down, but let us rejoice that God hath not forgotten to be gracious. Though our bodies will sink into the dust, they will ere long rise again, and we shall be in glory for ever with the Lord. Blessed be his name. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxvii.

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ISRAEL AND BRITAIN. A NOTE OF WARNING.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 7TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: that the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him."—John xii. 37—41.

THE blindness of Israel concerning our Lord was sadly remarkable. It was a blindness of the eyes, for they saw his many miracles, and yet believed not: their ears also seemed to be stopped, for they heard his words and did not understand them; and their hearts also were heavy, for they did not relent under the plaintive admonitions of a Saviour's love. Their hearts were cruel towards the Messiah; they hated him without a cause. No door was open to the heart of Israel; they had hardened their heart, they had shut their eyes, they had stopped their ears, and even he that spake as never man spake gained no access to their souls. They went so far as to crucify him, and cried as they did so, "His blood be on us, and on our children,"—words so sadly verified when Jerusalem was destroyed, and her children slaughtered, sold as slaves, or scattered to the four corners of the earth. It was, indeed, a terrible blindness which happened unto Israel.

Her rejection of the Lord Jesus is the more amazing because Isaiah gave so clear an account of the Messiah, and so clearly pictured Jesus of Nazareth. Descriptions of him could not have been more explicit than were the prophecies of Isaiah. It would be very easy to construct an entire life of Christ out of the book of Isaiah, beginning with "a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," and ending with "he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death." Isaiah spake of John the Baptist as the "voice crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God," and he foretold our Lord's ministry by the way of the sea beyond Jordan in Galilee of the Gentiles, where the people who sat in darkness saw great light. The prophet portrayed his Lord as "despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows

and acquainted with grief." Clearest of all is he upon his vicarious sufferings, concerning which he uses a variety of most definite expressions, such as,—"The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." Isaiah saw so clearly the day of our Lord Jesus that he spake rather as an evangelist than as a prophet; as an eye-witness, rather than as one foretelling a far-off event. Yet all this clearness was lost upon the men of his generation, and upon those who followed after. The nation had so long been fickle towards God, and had trifled so long with God's truth, that it was at length given up to a judicial hardness of heart, so that it could not understand or perceive. They refused the plainest messages of grace, and were so confirmed in unbelief that all their prophets cried with one plaintive voice, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

Nor was it alone grievous that Israel sinned against the light which shone in Isaiah's testimony; but, alas, she closed her eyes against the meridian splendour of our Lord's own life. Jesus bore his own witness in his person, teachings, works, and gifts. A sad wonder lies in the fact, that they did not know the Lord of glory although they saw his miracles, which were sure witnesses to his claims. He wrought among them works which none other man did. There is about our Lord a likeness to God: in all that he does the Godhead shines forth. He is so pure that he can say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" How like to him who is saluted as "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts!" His teaching is so full of tenderness and gentleness that since God is love, we conclude that Christ is God. His many miracles touch upon every point in the great circle of omnipotence. What is there that God can do which the Christ did not do? Was he not multiform and multitudinous in his works of power and grace? Herein lay the wonder, that though he did so many miracles before them, not in secret but actually before their eyes; though he fed them with bread which they could see, and handle, and eat; though he healed the sick and raised the dead, they yet believed not on him. How sadly far can men go in unbelief, prejudice, and hardness of heart! How dim can human eyes become when men refuse to see! How darkened the understanding when men are unwilling to comprehend! Let us tremble at this, lest we ourselves by imitating the chosen people in their unbelief should fall into like bondage to prejudice and ignorance, lest we by tampering with truth should come at last to be incapable of perceiving it, lest we also by rejecting the testimony of God should be given up to our own wilfulness, to believe a lie and refuse the truth. Such, then, as Isaiah had foreseen, was the state of Israel in our Lord's day: never clearer evidence, and never more obstinate refusal to see it; never truth more plain, and never rejection so determined. Woe to those who close their ears; for the day cometh when they shall no longer hear! Woe to those who shut their eyes to the light, for they shall ere long be made blind! Isaiah was informed that such would be the outcome of his ministry: the Lord bade him say to the people, "Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not." This must have been a very sad business for so generous and tender-hearted a man of God. It was painful to him to be so clear and yet to be so little understood. He was the Paul of the Old Testament; to him belonged

fulness of knowledge, clearness of vision, plainness of speech, and faithfulness of spirit, and yet none of these things could make the people understand his message and receive it into their hearts. He was sublime in thought, attractive in word, and affectionate in spirit, and yet they did not believe his testimony; so that he must often have been astonished and heart-broken as he spake in vain to a people who were determined that they would not hear.

This morning I shall draw certain lessons for ourselves from the great evangelical prophet, his ministry, and the people to whom he ministered so vainly. Our first meditation shall be *concerning Isaiah and his ministry*: and our second shall be *concerning the people to whom he spake.* Alas! I fear that we who speak in the name of the Lord in these last days have also to deal with hearts that are gross, ears that are heavy, and eyes that are dimmed. Upon this generation also there is falling a measure of judicial withdrawal of light and discernment; and we also have to cry, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"

I. First, then, let me speak with you CONCERNING ISAIAH AND HIS MINISTRY. Oh, that the Spirit of God may speak with power through me. Our text says two things of Isaiah: first, that "he *saw* his glory," and secondly, that "he *spake* of him."

The first statement is that Isaiah *saw.* Isaiah was a great seer: his prophesy begins thus,—"The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem." All prophets were more or less seers, and saw what they foretold; but Isaiah above others was endowed with the seeing and foreseeing faculty. He had the clearest sight, and for that reason he had the clearest speech. When a man speaks so that you cannot understand him, the usual reason is that he does not understand himself; and when a man speaks so as to be readily comprehended, it is because the thought in his own mind is well defined. He that would speak well must see well. Mark the two things in the text—"When Isaiah saw his glory, and spake of him."

In what sense is Isaiah said to have seen that which he spake? Does it not mean that he realized his thoughts? that they stood out vividly, so as to make a deep impression upon his own mind? Things to come were already come in his apprehension: he beheld what he believed, he felt what he foretold. He was not a dreamy person, maundering about half-fashioned, undeveloped thoughts; but he was a person who knew, and perceived, and felt what he preached. He saw with his soul what he set forth with his lips.

But what did he see? It is a most important thing that in these days you and I should see the same, for the same work lies before us among a people who are a repetition of that disobedient and gainsaying nation. Read, then, with care the sixth chapter of Isaiah. Open your Bibles and refer to the passage verse by verse.

First, what Isaiah saw was *the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.* When the prophet went abroad among the people he heard them speaking against the Lord God; some contending for one deity and some for another; some leaning upon an arm of flesh, and others despising the promise of Jehovah the God of Israel. All this, I say, he saw out of doors, and he was troubled. But when he went into the

sanctuary of God he saw the Lord sitting upon a throne: still reigning, still glorious, undisturbed by opposition. He must then have felt like David when he said, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." As David saw Christ upon the throne amid the strivings of the people, so did Isaiah see the Lord Jesus, not only upon the lowly mercy-seat, but upon a throne high and lifted up. I pray you, brethren, settle this in your hearts: our Lord is highly exalted as Lord of all. When you see evil occurrent, do not imagine that it defeats the eternal purposes of Jehovah: when you hear blasphemy and your blood runs cold, do not think that Christ has lost his glory: when men riot in sin, do not dream that the reins of affairs are out of Jesus' hands; for still he is "God over all, blessed for ever." My heart exults this day, as, by undoubting faith, I am assured that he who died on Calvary is now exalted on high, far above all principalities and powers. "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ!" To thee our spirits ascribe infinite honour, world without end. Though the earth be removed, and the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, yet the Lord reigneth. He that died upon the tree is crowned with majesty, and all the angels of God worship him. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." Let us have no question about this; for if we have, we shall not be prepared to speak in the Lord's name with this evil generation. Amid the anarchy of the ages we see the glorious high throne of our redeeming Lord unmoved, unmovable: this is the rock of our refuge when the unsettled times rage about us like the waters of the troubled sea. We cannot be afraid, for Christ is on the throne.

Observe that in Isaiah's vision he not only saw the Lord "upon a throne high and lifted up," but he saw that "*his train filled the temple.*" so that in that temple there was room for no one else. The robes of this great King filled all the holy place; and neither priests nor offerers could there find standing-room. It is a great thing to see how Jesus fills the heavenly places; in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead. Let it be acknowledged to be so in heaven, for the glory of our Redeemer fills every street of the upper city, every mansion of the Father's house. In the church below, which is also his temple, among his spiritual people, the glory of the Lord Jesus engages and occupies every heart. They feel that there is none other in whom they can trust, none other whose words they will receive, none other in whom they glory; the Lord Christ is all in all to us, and we know no other Master or Saviour. His train fills the temple. I trust it is so among us. From Sabbath to Sabbath the one glory of this Tabernacle is the person and work of Jesus. What a glory hath God put upon the Only Begotten Son, whom he hath raised from the dead that he should be head over all things to his church, which he fills with his life, light, and love. Nor may we forget that all the things that exist are in a sense his temple, and the whole universe is filled with his train; for "he hath ascended up far above all heavens that he might fill all things." Glory be unto our ascended and reigning Lord.

In his vision Isaiah saw *the flaming spirits that wait upon the Christ of God.* He calls them "seraphims." The best interpretation we can give is "burning ones": they burn in the sense of consuming. They burn up that which ought to be consumed, namely, all kinds of evil. There are powers around our Lord which will destroy evil. You ask me to tell you something about these seraphim; how can I? They have covered their faces, and covered their feet. Since nothing is to be seen, what can I tell you? Neither would it be right for us to speak concerning them, for manifestly it is their desire to be hidden. Who will violate their wish to be concealed? They covered their faces, they covered their feet, and therein they did as good as say, "Look not on us, but look on him who sits upon the throne, whose attendants we are." This much is all we know,—exalted intelligences are in waiting upon our Lord, and are able to fly swiftly at his bidding. Tremble not concerning this error, or that, it shall be burnt up by those agencies which are at the command of our exalted Lord. Spirits from God shall run to and fro, and smite, as with the fire of God, those powers of darkness which now oppress our race. God himself is a consuming fire: who can dwell with him but those that are like him? He maketh his ministers a flame of fire. Around our Lord are the chariots of God, which are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels. His power knows no limit. His word runneth very swiftly; he speaks, and it is done; he commands, and it stands fast. Glory be unto thee, O Christ! We will not fear nor be discouraged, since these thy servants are ready to flame forth at thy bidding. Truly thou art Jehovah of hosts.

This vision of the body-guard of the Prince of peace was enough to strengthen Isaiah: thus comforted, he would calmly confront that rebellious generation. If the prophet, when he opened the young man's eyes strengthened his heart by making him see horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, shall not we be comforted as we behold legions of burning ones surrounding our King, and standing ready to fulfil his decrees?

Further, we find that Isaiah saw in that vision *the perpetual adoration which is rendered unto Christ concerning his holiness.* Those bright spirits had never tasted of his mercy, for they had never sinned: they understood nothing of his grace, for they had not been guilty; but being pure in heart they gazed on the Lord with opened eye and adored his holiness. Their whole souls were filled with the contemplation of that one all-embracing attribute; and in responsive song they said each one to his fellow, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." They emphasized their words by repeating them three times; and perhaps they alluded also to the Trinity in Unity as they cried, "Holy, holy, holy." This is the supreme glory of Christ, that in him is seen the holiness of God. Oh my friends, let us be like these seraphim, ravished with the holiness of the atonement, awe-struck with the justice of God in the great sacrifice. Reflect with reverence that God when he willed to save his elect would not commit a breach upon his laws; though he would redeem them from going down into the pit, yet he would not violate his word, nor change that most righteous penalty of death, which is the due desert of sin. Rather than stain his holiness he spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all. Consider the great love of holiness which must have been in the heart of

the Father, that he would give up his Son to bleed sooner than his law should be dishonoured; and think of the great holiness of Christ, that he would rather give his back to the smiters and his cheeks to them that pluck off the hair, yea, rather stretch out his hands to the nails and expire forsaken of his God, than suffer sin to go unpunished. God would not even for mercy's sake issue an unjust pardon to the souls he loved.

As I stand here this morning I also have visions of God, and the cross seems to me transformed into a burning throne, whereon justice is high and lifted up to the uttermost, as I see God himself in Christ Jesus bowing his head to death, that he might be just, and yet the Justifier of him that believeth. Around that cross I see troops of angels gathering, and I hear one crying unto another and saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah Jesus, the great sacrifice for sin." Do you not unite in their reverent homage? If you do you will go forth and tell of pardon bought with blood, and of the atonement finished once for all. With hallowed confidence you will tell it out among the people that the holy Lord reigneth from the tree, until all creatures fall down and worship him that was slain, because his holiness was thereby revealed in noonday splendour.

This was not all that was revealed to the prophet; for he heard the seraphim say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of Hosts; *the whole earth is full of his glory.*" Even when men rejected Christ, even when hearts were fat, and eyes were dim, and ears were heavy, even then the whole earth was full of the glory of Christ. When scientists tell us that they cannot see God, I am amazed. To me it is impossible *not* to see him. Though I cannot pry with the scalpel into the anatomy of the human frame, yet when I look upon the mere skin of the human countenance I see the handiwork of God. Though I cannot dig into the lower strata of the earth and disentomb the fossil and decipher its stone-preserved memorial, yet to me rock, and clay, and sand, and relic of the past, bear the sure hieroglyph of God. Though I cannot inform you of all the interesting details of insect life, or descant upon the secrets of botany, yet to me bees bring honeyed thoughts of God, and flowers breathe the perfume of his love. Where is God? Say rather, Where is he not? Not with these grosser senses, but by higher faculties I see and hear my God; yea, he doth surround me, and my faith embraceth him. I am no fool for this; the best authority declares that he is the fool who saith in his heart "There is no God." Yes, the whole earth is full of the glory of Christ, and above the earth in every cloud it is seen, and above the cloud every star shines out concerning him. Alas, for the blind-eyes that cannot see that which is evidently set forth in every place. Alas for the ears which cannot hear when earth, and sea, and heaven, and hell, are all echoing to the tread of the Omnipotent Christ of God. Oh brethren, have you ever seen this vision, have you ever seen God's glory filling the whole earth? If so, you are prepared for the times that are and are to be times of gloom, and darkness, and sin, and blasphemy—and yet your heart does not tremble for the ark of the Lord.

When all this was seen of the prophet, he noticed that *the posts of the doors moved.* If I am rightly informed, there were two huge columns before the temple called Jachin and Boaz. These were

made with singular skill, and were the wonder of the age. They were of brass, cast by Solomon; but in the course of ages they had no doubt mellowed into bronze, and there they stood, two tremendous erections, upbearing massive doors. We are told, I know not whether it be correct, that the gates that swung upon these columns required at least twenty men either to open or to shut them; but as the prophet saw that vision he noticed that these massive columns trembled, and thus did obeisance to the God who was within their gates. Our Revised Version reads it, "The foundations of the thresholds were moved." Even to its foundations the house trembled with solemn awe of the divine presence. Brethren, heaven, and earth, and hell, and all created things reflect the glory of the Lord, and thus adore him. Oh Lord Jesus, thou art worthy of all honour. "All the earth doth worship thee." If it was so with posts and doors, shall not our hearts rejoice with trembling? shall not our souls be moved in the presence of the Most High? and will we not fall down before the glorified Christ, as John did, who wrote, "When I saw him I fell at his feet as dead"? Everything is filled with awe in his majestic presence, save only man, the impious rebel who dares defy his God.

Then came the best part of the vision for Isaiah. At the glorious sight, he felt, "Woe is me, for I am undone, I am stricken dumb. I can never speak again, for my lips are unclean, and I dwell among an unclean people." Then, swift as lightning flew a seraph, bringing a coal more burning than himself from off the altar of sacrifice, wherewith he touched the prophet's lip. Beloved, this is what *we* need. We need to feel the atonement laid home to us, to feel the power of the great sacrifice of Christ, to hear a voice saying within our spirit, "Thine iniquity is put away, and thy sin is purged." Though that live coal must have blistered the lip which it covered, yet it made it eloquent. Common fire would destroy the organs of speech, but the fire of sacrifice does not so, but it unlooses a grateful tongue, and helps a grateful heart to tell the love immense, unsearchable, which offered itself upon the altar of sacrifice, that holiness and love might save the sinner. Our peace comes from the Holy, Holy, Holy One, who is just, and yet forgives his people's sin. Brother, if you are to proclaim the glory of your Lord, you must feel the sacrificial coal applied to the place where your impurity is most seen, even to your lips; you must know that you are forgiven; for your conviction that you are clean before God will give you confidence in telling out to others the story of the cross. This is what Isaiah saw.

Listen for a minute to that further word that follows:—Isaiah when he saw his glory "*spake of him.*" He that hath seen this sight must speak.

He spake in deep humility. Never braver man than Isaiah, but never one who walked in lowlier reverence before his God. He never forgot to his dying day that "Woe is me! for I have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Yet, observe that he spake with very willing obedience. "Here am I," he said, "send me." He offers himself to be God's mouth to the people, whatever the message may be. He seems to say, "Here am I in the entirety of my being, purchased to thee by thy great pardoning

love; use me as thou wilt, and send me where thou wilt." He continued to report his Lord's message under constant rebuffs, and despite the ceaseless obduracy of Israel. Though he cried, "Who hath believed our report?" yet he continued that report. That chapter which begins with his complaint, has in it not only a continuation of the report, but a fuller version of it than he had ever given before. He was sad but resolute, grieved yet persevering, broken in heart, but not broken down in constancy. Brethren, it needs great grace to go upon a fruitless errand. One had need see the glory of the Lord to be enabled to fight a losing battle. I am sometimes afraid that I have to do this myself; but if it be so, it is not ours to bargain for success, but to yield implicit obedience. It is ours to abide faithful to our commission, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear. Brethren, be it ours to serve the Lord gladly, and testify to what we have seen, even though no man should receive our witness.

But then it is said of Isaiah that he "spake of him," that is, of our Lord Jesus Christ. In all that Isaiah said he had an eye to Christ. It was all his business among men to speak of the glories of the coming Son of God. May the Lord give us such a sight of Christ in his glory that from this day forth we shall be absorbed in glorifying him. May our life be a perpetual ministry concerning Christ. Remember that word concerning John the Baptist, "John did no miracle, but all things that John spake of this man were true." If we can do no miracle and achieve no success, let us at least cry without ceasing, "Behold the Lamb of God." Though *we* decrease, it matters not so long as *he* doth increase; we are glad to disappear, as the morning star is lost at the rising of the sun. It is our delight to imitate the seraphim, and with veiled face and covered feet to attend about the throne of Jehovah Jesus our Lord.

II. I now ask your kind attention to the second part of my subject, which is a very painful one, CONCERNING THE NATION TO WHICH ISAIAH SPAKE. Their terrible sin lay in this, that they were willingly blinded by the light which ought to have been to them a help to see Christ, and they were hardened by those very truths which ought to have melted them. They became more and more adverse to Christ through beholding in him such a character as ought to have won their hearts. To the prophet's teaching they were entirely dead. A specimen of this we find in the succeeding chapters of Isaiah. Israel and Syria attacked Ahaz, whose reign followed those of Uzziah and Jotham. The prophet came and said to Ahaz, "Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be faint-hearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands." Ahaz was assured that God would help him if he would but trust in him; but instead of doing so, the king determined to petition for the help of the great king of Assyria, with the result in the long run that "the king of Assyria came unto him and distressed him, but helped him not." Isaiah, to confirm his message, bade the king choose any sign either in the depth or in the height above; but the infidel king replied, "I will not ask, neither will I test Jehovah." He had so defiantly cast off allegiance to the true God that he would not even accept a sign, though it was left to his own choice. Thus Isaiah's message was rejected though put in the most winning form, for the hearts of the

people were blinded and hardened so as to choose the way of destruction. Ultimately, as you know, the Assyrians carried the whole people away; for they had rejected God's message wilfully, and wrath came upon them. What a grievous task to be called to preach to such a people!

They went on from bad to worse as a nation; they turned aside grievously from God, and when they appeared to cleave to him it was in name only, but not in heart, so that when Christ came they were unable to discern him, for had they known him they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. This blindness was in part a punishment for their long rebellion. If men wilfully shut their eyes, do you wonder that they become blind? If men will not hear, do you wonder that they grow deaf? If men will not understand, do you wonder that they become stupid? He that perverts truth shall soon be incapable of knowing the true from the false. If you persist in wearing glasses that distort, everything will be distorted to you.

> "Hear the just law, the judgment of the skies!
> He that hates truth shall be the dupe of lies."

But although this blindness was a punishment for former sin, it was itself a sin. They wilfully rejected the testimony of God against themselves; they refused the self-evident Christ who would so greatly have blessed them. This wilful rejection was carried out so effectually that it became impossible to convert and heal them; they could not be instructed, or reformed, and therefore they were given over to destruction. Nothing remained but to allow the Romans to burn the temple and plough the site of the city. It was a dreadful thing that they should deliberately choose destruction, and obstinately involve themselves in the most tremendous of woes. Poor Israel, we pity thee! It was sad indeed to fall from so great a height! Yet we are bound to admit that God dealt with thee justly, for thou didst choose thine own delusions. The Lord cries, "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me." Our Saviour weeps and cries, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

What I have to say this morning is this—that I am growingly fearful lest our own country should furnish a parallel to all this. Read the story of England, beginning where you will, and see how gracious God has been to us. Note well our great deliverances, from the destruction of the Spanish Armada to the overthrow of Napoleon. Do not forget how often this little country has been made victorious in wars against great peoples, who thought to swallow her up. Then reflect how God sent the light to us; how the gospel spread all over England, and how it has in many ways been rejected. How often since the days of Cromwell Rome has been allowed to dim the light of our Protestantism, and how it labours to do so still! See how this people have received the truth of heaven, but again and again have proved false to it, turning at one time to superstition and at another time to infidelity. At this moment we are rich, and despite depression in business, we are less tried by it than any other nation. And what comes of all this mercy but increased sin? Why, at this

moment we have sin rampant among us almost beyond precedent. Think how the poor are oppressed and ground down with awful poverty in many parts of this great city. Shall not God avenge the cry of starving women? Worse still, if worse can be: those who dare walk our streets after sundown tell us that Sodom, in its most putrid days, could scarce exceed this metropolis for open vice. To our infinite disgust and horror, the names of certain of the greatest in the land are at this hour openly mentioned in connection with the filthiest debauchery. This is not the place for details, nor can I mention the matter, or even think of it without feeling my very soul on fire. Faithfulness requires plain speech; but it is a hideous evil that the dregs of vice should be the chosen luxury of certain of our hereditary legislators and rulers. Woe unto thee, Oh land, when thy great ones love the harlot's house! Deep is our shame when we know that our judges are not clear in this matter, but social purity has been put to the blush by magistrates of no mean degree; yea, it is said that the courts of justice have lent themselves to the covering and hushing up of the iniquities of the great. Shall not God be grieved by such a nation as this? He who has read a certain story, which is but too-well known, must have felt his ears tingle and his heart tremble. What is coming over us? What horrible clouds are darkening our skies? There were judges once who would not have suffered the laws to be trampled on by the great, but would have dealt out equal justice to rich and poor: I cannot persuade myself that it will be otherwise now, and yet I fear the worst. O God, have mercy upon the land whose judgment-seats and palaces are defiled with vice.

This is not all: a general indifference to all religion is creeping over the country; at least over this vast metropolis. Ask those who visit from door to door among our crowded populations, and they will tell you that never before in their life-time were there so few persons attendant upon the means of grace. Street after street of this city scarcely possesses more than one regular attendant upon the preaching of the word. The Sabbath is no longer a day of worship with millions. What continual efforts are made to rob us of the Sabbath-day; to degrade it into a common work-day, and to make a slave of the working-man. To-day the revelation of God is treated with indifference, or talked of as if it deserved no reverence or credit. Unbelief has sapped the foundations of the social fabric. Worst of all,—I must not hold back the charge, many of the avowed ministers of Christ are no ministers of faith at all, but promoters of unbelief. The modern pulpit has taught men to be infidels. What truth is there which has not been doubted by divines, questioned by doctors of divinity, and at length been denounced by the priests of "modern thought"? Nothing remains upon which a certain school of preachers have not spit their scepticism. The experience of the unbelief of Germany is being repeated here. Among those who are ordained to be the preachers of the gospel of Christ, there are many who preach not faith but doubt, and hence they are servants of the devil rather than of the Lord. Think not that I am aiming at the Church of England. With all my objection to a state-church, I am not so unjust as to conceal my belief, that I see in the Episcopal Church at this time less of unbelief than among certain Dissenters: in fact,

Nonconformity in certain quarters is eaten through and through with a covert Unitarianism, less tolerable than Unitarianism itself. So frequently are the fundamental doctrines of the gospel assailed, that it becomes needful, before you cross the threshold of many a chapel, to ask the question, "Shall I hear the gospel here to-day, or shall I come out hardly knowing whether the Bible is inspired or not? Shall I not be made to doubt the atonement, the work of the Holy Ghost, the immortality of the soul, the punishment of the wicked, or the deity of Christ?"

I know I shall stir a hornet's nest by these honest rebukes but I cannot help it. I am burdened and distressed with the state of religion; a pest is in the air; no truth is safe from its withering infection. No signs can be more alarming than the growing infidelity and worldliness which I see among those who call themselves Christians. Does this nation really intend to cast off the fear of God and the doctrines of Holy Scripture to follow the vain imaginings of the sophists and the fashionable follies of the great? Are we to see again unbelief and luxurious sin walking hand in hand? If so, there be some of us who mean to take up our sorrowful parable, and speak as plainly as we can for truth and holiness, whether we offend or please. Be it ours still to thunder out the law of God, and proclaim with trumpet clearness the gospel of Jesus, not bating one jot of firm belief in the revelation of God, nor winking at sin, nor toning down truth, even though we fear that the only result will be to make this people's hearts gross, and their ears heavy, and their eyes blind. If it must be so, my soul shall weep in secret; but still, Oh Lord, here am I, send me. Be of good courage, Oh my heart, for the faithful have not ceased from among men; other voices will cry aloud and spare not, if haply our land may be purged of its present defilement.

Hearken yet again while I press this subject personally home to you. Has not this word a personal bearing upon some of you? Certain of you have heard the gospel preached plainly and honestly, and yet you have never received it: is there not creeping over you a fatal indifference? Are not your hearts turning to stone? Possibly you are professors of religion, and yet you do not feel the power of it; what does this mean? If you are not a praying people, nor a holy people, and yet are a professing people, what an awful doom awaits you! Shall my ministry be a savour of death unto you? It may be that my voice grows stale to you, and what I say seems common-place: but is this to be the reason for your refusing Christ and his salvation, refusing the power of his word, refusing holiness which he would work in you? Oh, shall it be so? Will you die? Dear hearers, I should not like to meet one of you at the day of judgment and have to feel that I preached you into a greater blindness than you might have known. Oh, be converted! Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? May God in infinite mercy speak to you that you may believe in Jesus now, lest that should come upon you which is spoken of by the prophet, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!"

Ere I have done, hear the sweet whisper which closes the sixth of Isaiah. Notwithstanding all the terrible work that Isaiah had to do he was not left without comfort; the Lord said to him, "In it there shall be a tenth." You know how the prophet cried, "Except the Lord

of hosts had left us a seed we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrah." The Lord has his sacred tithe and these he will not lose. The tree has lost its leaves, for it is winter time; but still it is alive, and the sap will flow again, for its subtance is in it! The tree is levelled by the axe; but weep not despairing tears, for it shall sprout again, for life is still in it. Even so the Church must live; truth must be victorious; purity must conquer, the Christ must reign. Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him. Reject Christ if you will to-day, Oh ye who think yourselves so exceeding wise, but there is a people who love him, a secret people who cling to him; and when he comes, as come he must ere long, they will welcome him and partake in his glory. As for you that refuse him this day, how will you stand when he appeareth? Whither will you flee? You shall ask the hills to cover you, but they will refuse. You shall bid the mountains hide you, but they will not yield a cavern for your shelter. Be wise now, therefore, and no more resist your Lord. "Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way while his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him!" May you and I and all of us be of that blessed number. Amen and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xii. 37—50; Isaiah vi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—93, 12, 518.

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THE PITIFULNESS OF THE LORD THE COMFORT OF THE AFFLICTED.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 14TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On behalf of the London Hospitals.

"Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."—James v. 11.

WE are far too apt to entertain hard thoughts of God. The horrible atheism of our depraved nature continually quarrels with the Most High; and when we are under his afflicting hand, and things go cross to our will, the evil of our nature becomes sadly evident. When sorely distressed, we are too apt to think and to speak as we ought not to do concerning the Most High. Let us never forget that our hard speeches have all been false speeches, and that our suspicions of our God have always been libels upon him. When we have not thought and spoken well of his name, we have thought and spoken amiss. Looking back, we desire, if possible, to blot out every murmuring thought with our tears, and we would cancel every complaining word with humble sorrow. We would eat our bitter words; they were all unwarranted, and therefore with deep repentance we call them back. On taking a survey of our whole life, we see that the kindness of God has run all through it like a silver thread. Goodness and mercy have followed us all our days, ever pursuing us even when we have wickedly fled from them. Even our apparent ills have been real blessings. As I said in prayer, so say I now: I do not know for which I would bless God most, for my sorrows or for my joys. The best piece of furniture I have ever had in my house is the cross of affliction. Adversity is the richest field in all the farm of life. We have never reaped such a harvest from any seed as from that which fell from our hand while tears were falling from our eyes. When we have gone forth weeping, bearing precious seed, we have invariably come again rejoicing, bringing our sheaves with us. O thou sufferer, when thy bed grew hard beneath thee, and thy pain was exceeding great, it may be that thy groanings and complaints were not altogether those of sorrow, but a measure of rebellion mingled with

them. For this be ashamed and confounded. Confess those rebellions, acknowledge that thy hard thoughts were all founded upon error, and ask for grace to be henceforth at one with thy Lord. Thou who hast suffered the loss of property or the loss of beloved friends, thou, too, perhaps hast thought of God foolishly; remember those thoughts with shame, and be all the more eager at once to bear willing testimony that the Lord is good, and that his mercy endureth for ever. True it is, however circumstances may look otherwise, that "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." Whatever may or may not be, the Lord must be good. Set your seal to that truth. Hold up your head and your hand as one who can speak well of his name, and say, "I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth."

Let each restored man say, "He healeth all my diseases." Let each tried one now say, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Let the aged man bring the spoils of his experience and lay them down at the feet of the Lord who hitherto hath helped him. Our desire this morning will be to help one another to avoid future murmurings. We have really nothing to complain about: even our disappointments will yet be causes for praise. O may the Spirit of God now make us wise to avoid such hasty blunders in the future; and teach us to know the Lord so well that we may henceforth be at peace with him, whatever he may do! O that we may never bear false witness against our God. The apostle James in this passage aims at setting us right in our judgments of the Lord's dealings, that patience may become an easier lesson.

Will you notice that the apostle, first, in this verse, *cites an instructive instance* of the tender pitifulness of God: "Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord." Then, secondly, *he makes a consoling statement*, and lays it down as a matter of doctrine that "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." When we have talked upon those two matters, we shall close by observing *the precious lessons* which we ought to gather from them, as bees fetch honey from the flowers.

I. Notice that when James is exhorting us to full confidence in God in the hour of trial, he gives us AN INSTRUCTIVE INSTANCE. He quotes the story of Job. In these days everything is doubted, and a new theory is sure to run like fire among stubble; for this fickle age delights, like the Athenians, in everything new, however absurd it may be. Hence no part of Scripture has been let alone, and of the Book of Job it has been said that it is a drama, a fiction, a fine piece of Oriental imagination. But see how the New Testament protects the Old. How can Job be an imaginary character? Does the Spirit of God quote for our guidance a fictitious personage? Does he set Job before us as an example when Job never existed? The thing is too absurd to contemplate for a single moment. There was such a person as Job; and possibly the present passage may confirm us in the belief that the patriarch lived in the earliest ages, since this apostle, when mentioning the prophets, places Job in the forefront of them, and quotes his case in preference to any other. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction,

and of patience. . . . Ye have heard of the patience of Job." He might have mentioned Jacob, or Moses, or David, as examples of heroic endurance; but he cites Job, in all probability as being first in order of time and in degree of trial. I conceive him to have been one of the earliest of those gracious personages who walked with God through much tribulation, and endured as seeing him who is invisible. At any rate, we are certain that James does not bring before us the imaginary actor in an Oriental tale as an argument for patience; for when men are suffering they have no patience with fiction, they are in no humour for amusement; and suffering men will only endure to be comforted by the story of real persons who have literally known the sufferings of life. Should you try to stimulate the afflicted to patience by a piece of fiction, they would turn upon you with indignation, and say: "Yes, you demand a patience of me which was never found in mortal man; you ask me to display a virtue which was never actually exemplified in history, and so you are driven to invent a personage for my imitation." It is too absurd.

Observe, that when this apostle introduces Job it is with the view of pointing out the tender mercy of God in his case; and he begins by saying, "Behold, we count them happy which endure." The pitifulness and tender mercy of God are to be seen *in the happiness of those who are called to suffer*. "We count them happy which endure." Who counteth them happy? It is a counting which is not general. This arithmetic is only known to faith, and must be learned of the Lord Jesus. "We," that is, the Church of God, count them happy who are counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. We do not deem those to be happy who sport their lives away, and end a wasted life of luxury by a dreadful death in unbelief. We do not count those to be happy who are fattened like the beasts in the pasture, but shall soon be brought to the slaughter: such are all around us, but we sorrow because of them. We are not so foolish as to count those happy who spread themselves like a green bay tree, only to be the sooner laid low by the axe of doom. We count those happy who endure, because our Saviour has taught us so to reckon. Did he not say, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you"? Did he not also say, "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"? This is the verdict of the Saviour, and the true disciple must not dream of disputing with his Master. It is ours to believe that those who endure the will of God are among the happiest of the race; for the inspired Psalmist hath said, "Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord."

I may venture to say that the more sensible part of mankind in some measure concur with the people of God in this accounting. We count that man happy who has passed through trial and hardship with a brave endurance. Such life is of an interesting and manly kind; but life without struggle and difficulty is thin and tasteless. How can a noble life be constructed if there be no difficulty to overcome, no suffering to bear? What was there about Dives, and his fine linen, and sumptuous fare, to make a life of? Who envies him? Studying the lives of eminent men,

we come to this conclusion, that on the whole it is good for a man to bear the yoke; good for a man to breast the billows; good for a man to pass through fire and through water, and so to learn sublime lessons. When we see what poor, paltry things those are who are nursed in the lap of luxury, and consequently never come to a real manhood, "we count them happy that endure." No wise man would seek to be exempted from the healthy discipline of trouble, any more than an intelligent child would wish to be excused from school, and to be allowed to play all day and every day in the meadows. No: we are not butterflies that flit from flower to flower; life is real, life is earnest, and the tonic of sorrow braces and strengthens us to make it so. As a matter of faith, and even as a matter of reasonable judgment, "we count them happy which endure."

This counting is not mere fancy, but it is a correct estimate: there is a happiness in affliction which none will doubt who have tasted it. Within the rough shell of sorrow we find a sweet kernel. When we look to the end of affliction, when we see all its comfortable fruit, when we mark what it corrects, and observe what it produces, we judge that it is no mean blessing. Happy is the man who has been enabled to endure; he rises from the deeps of woe like a pearl-finder from the sea, rich beyond comparison. He has gained more than he has lost, even though he has lost everything, if he has gained contentment, conformity to the will of God, a deep experience, and a surer hope. Beloved, those of us who have done business upon great waters and have endured abundant pain count them happy that endure, even while they are enduring. The people of God find themselves more buoyant in the saltest seas of sorrow than in other waters. The cross does in very deed raise us nearer to Christ when it is fully sanctified. It could not do so if it were not sanctified by the Holy Spirit to that noble end; but under his hand it works out our lasting good. Rare gems glisten in the mines of adversity. I believe that the child of God seldom trusts God so simply at other times as he does when he is in great trouble. Then the second causes are all knocked away like dog-shores from a new-built vessel, and the soul glides like a ship from the stocks into the waters of grace which are her element. Creatures too often come between us and the Creator, and when they are removed we see Him more distinctly, whom to see is joy and peace. We never get so near to the source of all heavenly consolation as when earthly comfort is removed far away. God seemeth never so much a husband to any as to the widow; and never so much a father as to the fatherless. Our Lord Jesus assures us that the rich man hardly enters the kingdom: the general truth which lies within that fact is this—the wealth which we possess, be it of what kind it may, impoverishes us by making faith more difficult; and it is only by faith that we enter the kingdom of God. It is hard to learn swimming on dry land; but he that is in the water is driven to strike out: our troubles are such "waters to swim in." We are obliged—strange that we should need such forcing to it—we are obliged, I say, to cast ourselves on God when other helpers fail. It is written, "Blessed is he that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is": thus you see how sorrow compels us to the trust which makes us blessed, and thus you see why "we count them happy which endure."

Endurance also works in the child of God a close clinging to God, which produces near and dear communion with him. Have you not, in time of trouble, found yourself admitted to inner chambers, which aforetime had been closed to you? Oh, the rare fellowship of tried saints! Sorrows reveal to us the Man of Sorrows. Griefs waft us to the bosom of our God. See the little chicks to-day in the sunshine; they are running all over the yard to gather what they can; but a hawk is in the sky, and the mother calls them with a sharp alarm; they perceive the danger, and now they thrust themselves into her feathers and are hidden beneath her wings. He was a much afflicted man who wrote, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." The most delicious of sensations outside of heaven is to faint away upon the bosom of the Lord. We find strength in helplessness, joy in submission, rest in resignation, heaven in a full surrender. It is delightful to look up to a stripping and chastening God, and to say to him, "My soul is even as a weaned child. Do what thou wilt, for thy will is my will. I submit myself to the withdrawal of what has so long seemed the only source of my comfort and the fountain of my life; for thou thyself art better to me than all the breasts of consolation. I am sore wounded, but thou hast done it, and thou ever doest well; therefore, I will take pleasure in the grief thou sendest." Beloved, that suffering which gives new life to prayer, and opens to us the palace gates through which we pass into diviner fellowship is so great a boon that "we count them happy which endure."

Beside, the Lord has a choice way of manifesting himself unto his servants in their times of weakness. I speak what I do know; for I have trodden "that path which no bird of prey knoweth, neither hath the falcon's eye seen it"—the path upon which shines the inward personal revelation of God. He draws the curtain about the bed of his chosen sufferer, and at the same time he withdraws another curtain which aforetime concealed his glory. He takes away the delights of health and vigour, and then he implants energy of another and a higher order, so that the inner man waxeth mighty while the outer man decayeth. So wondrously doth grace work beyond nature that it transfigures bodily sickness into spiritual health. Men of God have been known to cry, "Take me back to the furnace again, for there one like unto the Son of God was evidently with me." When they have had solace in the creature, they have somewhat missed the sweetness of the Creator, and have sighed amid their earthly comforts for the loneliness which afforded them the nearer company of Jesus. I have never known more blissful seasons than those which my Lord vouchsafed me when I was abused by men, and had to fight a weary battle. After all, there is no place in all our pilgrim ways which, taken for all in all, has all the charms of the Valley of Humiliation. The tops of the Delectable Mountains are royal spots; from thence we sometimes see the Golden City; but these are heights too steep for our trembling feet continually to stand upon: the lowly valley suits us better, though flesh and blood find it hard to go downhill. Here the herb called heart's-ease groweth luxuriantly: and he that weareth it is happier than the courtier in silk and velvet. Delightful is that well-shaded valley, where the shepherd's boy sits and sings among his father's sheep—

"He that is down need fear no fall;
He that is low, no pride;
He that is humble ever shall
Have God to be his guide."

Bunyan truly says, "The Valley of Humiliation is of itself as fruitful a place as any the crow flies over." Chiefly is it so because in its wildernesses the Lord speaks to our hearts. To his child when passing through the glens of tribulation the Lord saith, "Certainly I will be with thee." In the furnace of affliction the Lord manifests himself to his chosen as he doth not to the world; yea, as he does not even to those of his people who are basking in prosperity; therefore, "we count them happy which endure." Brethren, do you not see how this changes the face of affliction? This brightens everything; for if it be, in the judgment of those who have experienced it, a happy thing to endure, then it is true that "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

Further, the Apostle gives us a hint of another matter. He adds, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." Now, notice here, *the notability*—I had almost said *the nobility—of endurance.* As one truly says, Job's bones had lain this day in the common charnel-house of oblivion if it had not been for his sufferings and his patience. "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." Who has not? But you would never have heard of Job if he had always been prosperous. His flocks and his herds, his gold and his silver, his children and their banquets, would none of them have earned immortality for his name; but his poverty and his sickness have done it. He had been simply an Oriental sheikh, honoured in his own day, but forgotten like his fellows, had not the malice of Satan and the grace of God forced him into notice. He was knighted on the battle-field. The stream of time has rolled over every other prince of his age, and we have never heard of them; but "ye have heard of the patience of Job." Who gets a patent of nobility from the throne of God unless it be by endurance? The names of the heroes of the cross are written in black ink with a heavy pen.

Even in worldly histories it is by enduring hardness that men build their memorials. Who that has read the classics has not heard of Mutius Scævola? and why? He was a valiant man, but he did not win his name by a common deed in battle. His fights are unrecorded; but you have heard of his laying his right hand upon the burning coals of an altar, to let Porsenna see how a Roman could endure pain without shrinking. When he suffered his right hand to burn he was writing his name in his country's annals. A thousand instances prove that only by endurance can names be graven in the brass of history. To make a man a man, to bring his manhood forward, and to make other men see it, there must be endurance. Read the lives of any who have become the leaders of our race; read the stories of any that are written in the bead-roll of fame, and you shall find that not without trial did they come to be renowned. Poor tailors, husbandmen, and apprentices live in the story of the church because they counted not their lives dear to them for Christ's sake. Simple maids and wives, unlettered and poor, are heard of to this day, and shall be heard of in eternity, because they were burned as martyrs for the truth. Who would have heard of Ann Askew if it were not that she was put upon the rack, and when every

bone was out of joint, and all her body was in exquisite torture, she baffled her tormentors. Well did she say—

"I am not she that list
My anchor to let fall
For every drizzling mist;
My ship's substantial."

She that could suffer and sing gained high rank among "the ladies of the covenant." He who is content to go down to a dishonourable grave may choose the bastard's portion, and escape the rod; but the true-born child of God has no such desire. You may, if you please, enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; but if God intends to honour you, you will choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God. If you would reign in Christ's kingdom you must drink of his cup, and be baptised with his baptism. Do not therefore look down upon those who suffer, but rather look up to them as among the higher classes of our race. The trials of Job elevated him into the peerage of the saints, and therefore we gather from this honourable result of endurance, "that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy," when he sends afflictions to his beloved ones.

Once again, in order to see the pitifulness of God in sorrow, we must *see the Lord's end in it;* for, saith the Apostle, "Ye have seen the end of the Lord." God's end in affliction is that which proves that he is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. Does it not strike you as rather a singular thing that when James wants to show us that the Lord is pitiful, and of tender mercy, he points us to Job on a dunghill, with all his property gone, with his children dead, with his wife ill-advising him, with his friends provoking him, and himself covered with sore blains from head to foot? Who can see the pitifulness and tender mercy of God there? Nobody that is blind; but he who has had his eyes opened by the Spirit of God can see it there, because he does not look so much at the process as at the result; he stays not with the crucible and the furnace, but joyously gazes upon the pure gold which comes from the refining pot. We see not so much *how* grace works as *what* it works. The design of the Lord is more to be noted than the method he pursues.

First, remember that the Lord's end in sending affliction to his people is corrective. Sanctified sorrow is a sharp frost which kills the germs of spiritual disease. Our griefs, like a hail-storm, break off the buds from the branches of sin, so that they do not produce the black, accursed fruit of actual transgression. How much we owe to the knife which cuts out the canker and the gangrene! Christ's vines would soon be in an evil case if it were not for the pruner. Let us bless God that though before we were afflicted we went astray, yet now, by the sanctifying processes of his providence and grace, we have learned to keep his word. Look at the corrective influence of sorrow, and you will not quarrel with the rod in a father's hands.

Moreover, affliction is sent for the display of grace. Our graces lie asleep within us like slumbering soldiers until affliction strikes its terrible drum, and awakens them. You shall not know that there is a bird in the wood if you are quiet; but if you break a bough they will become visible; and thus affliction, passing through our soul, startles all our

graces, and we perceive them, and God is honoured thereby. You cannot see the stars while the sun shines; wait till it is dark, and then you shall behold them: and many a Christian grace is quite imperceptible until the time of trial, and then it shines out with great lustre. All this supposes that grace is there; but if it be wanting, trial discovers the lack. You know not what spirit you are of till you have been under tribulation. You count yourself rich, but in the fire your gold is tested. You reckon that your house is well built, but the flames find out the wood, and hay, and stubble. Self-knowledge is never sure if it come not of tests and temptations. Therefore, we count them happy that endure, because they are less likely to be deceived. God is to be praised for the discovery of our graces, for thus affliction becomes a blessing without disguise.

Further, our trials are an education for the future. I do not think Job was fit to have any more substance until his heart had been enlarged by trouble; then he could bear twice as much as before. A man of God is not prepared to enjoy success till he has tasted defeat. Many an heir of heaven will never be fit for heaven till first of all he has been brought near to the gates of hell. You have been strengthened and prepared and made ready for a nobler future by your late experience of grief. A traveller said to me yesterday, speaking of the heat, how different it is from cold; for the more you suffer heat the less you can endure it; but the more you are tried with cold the more you can bear it, for it hardens you. I am sure it is so as to the influences of prosperity and adversity. Prosperity softens and renders us unfit for more of itself; but adversity braces the soul, and hardens it to patience.

Beloved, I would not have you forget that "the end of the Lord" is always with his tried people to give them greater happiness as the result of it. Job's double portion was an instructive type of what God does with his children in some form or other after trial. "Ye have seen the end of the Lord." Job came to the end of his words with great bitterness and sorrow of heart: but God's end was not yet; but when it came it was glorious and full of joy for his servant. Mark, in Job xxxi. 40, it is written, "The words of Job are ended," ended amid thistles and cockle; but the end of the Lord was very different, for he loaded his servant with pieces of money and earrings of gold, and blessed his latter end more than his beginning. Thine end, O thou that art tossed with tempest and not comforted, shall come forth from thy God when he shall lay thy stones with fair colours and thy foundations with sapphires. He will restore thy soul even in this life, and give thee joy and rest out of thy sorrow.

As for the life to come, how little do we take it into our estimate! It is as the main ocean, and this life is no better than the village brook. The sorrows of time are a mere pin's prick at the most, if we contrast them with the joy eternal. What shall we think of these temporary inconveniences when we reach eternal felicity? We shall look back upon our passing grief with wonder that we ever made so much of it. When the sunshine bursts upon us we shall smile to think of the flying clouds. We shall laugh to think that we were so depressed by our light affliction, which is but for a moment: the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory will cause us to despise the trivial trials of our mortal life. All this makes me say, and makes you see, that the end of the

Lord is love, and that in the trouble which he sends he is still "very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

II. Secondly, OUR APOSTLE MAKES A CONSOLING STATEMENT: "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

Observe that this is the teaching of God's holy Word; and therefore if we have at this moment no evidence of it perceptible to sight or sense, *we are bound to believe it* all the same. I ask the child of God to settle this in his mind. "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart." Though as for me, "my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped"; yet surely God is good to his own people. Whatever appears to conflict therewith, nothing can possibly shake the certainty of this fact, that "the Lord is pitiful, and of tender mercy." O weeping heir of heaven, though thy Father scourge thee, believe this, for he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth; and this also is true, that he receiveth every son whom he scourgeth. Rest thy heart upon this. Do not be persuaded by man or devil to think ill of thy God. He has a father's heart even when he makes thee feel the strokes of his hand. Thy God cannot be unkind to thee. He cannot forsake thee. Hath he not said, "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee"?

> "Such pity as a father hath
> Unto his children dear,
> Like pity shows the Lord to such
> As worship him in fear."

Believest thou this?

But, further, the text tells us that *this truth may be seen*, and while it is a matter of faith, yet it may be also a matter of sight. "Ye have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful"; this is so plain that you can see it. See, then, the pitifulness of God in upholding his people under trouble. He presses down with one hand, but he lifts up with the other. "Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion." His dealings with us are of the nature of the raindrop and the sunbeam: these are united in fashioning the covenant rainbow. Beloved, it is true, the Lord has burdened thee: is it not also true that he has sustained thee? Above is the billow, but "underneath are the everlasting arms." See the pitifulness of God in this!

How often the mercy of God is seen in sickness and suffering by his mitigating the pain and loss! One ounce more, and the back had broken, but that ounce never came; one breath more and the ship that even then staggered before the gale would have been driven to the bottom of the sea, but that breath of wind did not come. There is always a restraining of affliction, even in the hour of severest trial. Those who are washed in the blood of Jesus shall never be drowned in the sea of sorrow.

Observe also the tender pity of God in forgiving the sin of his suffering people. I bless the Lord that he has not taken notice of what I have thought and said when I have been greatly depressed and distracted by pain. Our Lord knows that the spirit is willing even when the flesh is weak; and he thinks kindly of us still. If he did mark my foolish despondencies, what could I say but "Lord, have mercy upon thy

foolish child"? When your child has a fever, it may be he is fretful, and begins to talk foolishly. May be he talks unkind things aganist those very persons whom in his heart he loves best. Do you ever say to the child afterwards, "John, I am very grieved that you said such shocking things about me and about your mother"? Far from it; you say, "Poor dear, he does not know what he is talking about; he is wandering in his mind." So does God deal with our naughtiness when we are under his hand; when he sees that it is rather weakness than wilfulness, he is very pitiful and full of compassion, and blots out the transgressions of his people.

See how the tenderness and pitifulness of God are also seen in the revelations he makes to his saints; but of that I have spoken, though I would not have you forget it.

So also in the overrulings of our sorrows his love is conspicuous. He often sends a great sorrow that we may not be compelled to bear a greater one. By fire he prevents conflagration; by pain he kills a greater pain. If you had not endured a certain trouble you might have been visited by seven troubles, each one more terrible than your present one. Thank God for the preventive operations of his providence!

Bless him, above all, for the sweet rewards that come to his tried people when afterwards they bear the comfortable fruits of righteousness, and especially when he comes to them in the riches of his grace, and turns their midnight into everlasting day.

In closing the second head I should like to say I wish we could all read the original Greek; for this word, "The Lord is very pitiful," is a specially remarkable one. It means literally that the Lord hath "many bowels," or a great heart, and so it indicates great tenderness. The God in whom some believe is unable to feel; they lay it down in their theology as an axiom that God cannot feel. This, however, I take leave to deny. God is able to do all things. I cannot regard him as though he were a block of wood, or a mass of iron, unable to feel. On the contrary, he is represented to us as greatly feeling: the God of many bowels. You know how a sensitive person is affected at the sight of suffering. Some persons cannot bear to see a creature in pain; they are unmanned thereby, and begin to weep like children. Our God is not only pitiful, but *very* pitiful; not only of mercy, but of *tender* mercy. Our Lord Jesus Christ, when he was here on earth, was the image of the Father, and we read of him often that "he was moved with compassion." After this sort are we to think of the great God who is full of bowels towards suffering men.

The other word is the complement of the first—"and of tender mercy." There is then, you see, in these two words, pity for misery and mercy for sin: there is inward pity in the heart of God, and outward action in the mercy of God; there is sympathy for suffering, and grace for guilt. These two things make up what we want. That God should pity our griefs and forget out sins, that God should think kindly of us, and act helpfully towards us—these are our greatest needs. What a sea of goodness is in my text: "very pitiful, and of tender mercy!" Believe you, then, of God, and see it to be true, that for the woes of man he has a tender heart. Forget not that word, "In all their afflictions he was

afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them." Our God is not cold and hard, but very pitiful. He is infinitely just, and will assuredly punish sin; but side by side with his justice stands his love! He is as pitiful as if he had forgotten to be righteous: indeed, he is much more so; for were he less righteous he would be less kind. If you would see his goodness and his justice blended, behold the Son of God upon the tree, dying in our stead. Never doubt his tenderness who gave his Only-begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

III. Now I have to close with THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED out of the whole subject. I will but hint at them.

The first is *be patient.* The whole context teaches us patience. Read the chapter at home, and see how James continues to say, "Be patient." Be patient for this reason, that God "is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." A person going to a surgeon will bear sharp pain when he is convinced that by such pain his cure will be wrought. If a man proposes to gash me with a lancet I decline his offer; but if I know that I shall die unless the incision be made, and if I believe that an intolerable pain will thus be assuaged, I say, "Welcome the knife." Let him cut without mercy, if by it he intends mercy. It might be unmerciful to stay the hand in such a case. Such knowledge should make us patient under divine chastisement. The Lord never grieves us because he likes to grieve us. "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." There is a needs be for every sorrow. Though now for a season we are in heaviness, there is a necessity for it. Do not kick against the goad, lest it prick thee all the more. Be thou silent before God, lest he rebuke thee for thy foolish speech. When the sheep is being shorn, if it kicks it will be cut with the shears, but if it will lie quite still the shearer will take off all the wool and never harm the flesh. Lie still, brother; let the Good Shepherd clip as he pleases; though he may cut very close to the skin, he is very pitiful, and will only rid thee of that which would harm thee.

The next lesson is, *be penitent.* You unconverted ones here to-day, if you are suffering and sorrowful, I want you to feel that God is sending this sorrow in love to your souls: he smites you that you may turn to him in repentance; he chastens you that he may bring you to himself, that you may not perish for ever. He "is very pitiful." His hand is strong to smite, but it is also strong to save. Return to thy Father, O thou prodigal. Though thou hast spent thy substance, though thou hast brought thyself to rags, return to thy Father; there is bread enough in his house; and, better still, there is love enough in his heart to welcome even thee. See, he hastes to meet thee as soon as thy face is toward him, for he is ready to forgive. Oh, you that have been hardened by your distresses, repent of this wickedness, lest, like Pharaoh, you are plagued even to destruction. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near. He welcomes all who repent; he is eager to forgive; delay no longer. O Spirit of the Lord, hasten the returning sinner!

The last lesson is, *be pitiful.* If God be pitiful and of tender mercy, children of God, you are to imitate him, and to be pitiful, too. This truth is to be remembered at all times; but just now you have an oppor-

tunity of showing your pitifulness towards the poor and sick of this great city. When you relieve the wants of a man in health you may possibly assist him in his vices; but in helping the sick poor you can do no wrong. The door of a hospital is open for good, and only for good. I am concerned to know that there are many beds unoccupied and many suffering persons kept out of the hospitals from lack of funds. Whole wards are rendered useless for want of income. In some cases the authorities are compelled to use those wards for persons who can pay for attendance; and though this is a good thing, yet I cannot forget that those who cannot pay are thus deprived of what they need so much more than others. You that have been sick yourselves should give liberally to-day out of sympathy; you that have never been sick ought to give twice as much out of gratitude. Yet I must correct myself; those who have been afflicted and healed should feel both sympathy and gratitude, and so should give the double of those from whom I have asked double liberality. Let us try to give to this fourfold degree. When the box is passed round, be pitiful, and of tender mercy, like your Father and your God, and then the hospitals will be largely helped this day.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm ciii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—103 (Version III.), 214, 195.

JUST PUBLISHED.

MY SERMON-NOTES.

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THE PURGING OF THE CONSCIENCE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 21ST, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"—Hebrews ix. 13, 14.

SOME of you may remember that six years ago I preached from this text, principally dwelling upon the type of the red heifer.* We then tried to show how in these ashes of the heifer, laid by in store and applied to the unclean with water, God gave to his people in the wilderness a purification of the flesh whenever they had defiled themselves by touching any dead thing. This was the great instrument by which they were delivered from a ceremonial quarantine under which they were kept apart till they had been purified. I am not going to enlarge upon that type to-day. I felt when preaching upon it that I had not reserved due space for the latter and more important part of the text: it is my purpose to make amends this morning. May we be helped by the Spirit of God to yield our earnest attention to the deeply important subject now before us. The red cow may roam out of notice, and the Christ of God shall alone be seen.

"To serve the living God" is necessary to the happiness of a living man: for this end were we made, and we miss the design of our making if we do not honour our Maker. "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him for ever." If we miss that end we are ourselves terrible losers. The service of God is the element in which alone we can fully live. If you had a fish here upon dry land, supposing it possible that it could exist, yet it would lead a very unhappy life: it would scarcely be a fish at all! You could not tell of what it was capable; it would be deprived of the opportunity of developing its true self. It is not until you put it into the stream that the fish becomes really a fish and enjoys its existence. It is just so with man: he does exist without God, but we may not venture to call that existence "life;" for "he shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." If he lives in pleasure, yet he

* "The Red Heifer," No. 1,481, Vol. xxv.

is dead while he lives. He is so constituted that to develop his manhood perfectly, as God would have it to be, he must addict himself to fellowship with God, and to the service of God. Many ways have been tried by men to make themselves perfectly content, but they cannot find satisfaction out of God. When a man getteth to serve God, and in proportion as he thoroughly does so, he is peaceful, restful, and happy. Man is a fallen star till he is right with heaven: he is out of order with himself and all around him till he occupies his true place in relation to God. When he serves God, he has reached that point where he doth serve himself best, and enjoy himself most. It is man's honour, it is man's joy, it is man's heaven, to live unto God.

God's idea of what a nation should be was set forth in the camp in the wilderness. If God's command had been fully carried out, the desert would have exhibited a scene of highest blessedness. We should have seen a holy people surrounding the central abode of the Holy God; a people, every one of whom was a servant of God and a priest for his worship; a people whose ordinary everyday life was sanctified by the presence of God; a people whose shadow by day was God in the cloud, and whose light by night was God in the pillar of fire; a people to whom God was leader, for whom God was the vanguard, and for whom God brought up the rear; a people who lived upon the bread of heaven; a people who drank of water which leaped by divine power from the rock; a people having God to be their glory and their defence. Happy had they been if they could have carried out the divine ideal; it would have been well with them in the highest degree. Alas! they were always seeking to be as the evil nations around them; they could not rest till they had descended to the level of the common mass of mankind; but if they could have risen to God's intent, so that the divine purpose of love had been fully carried out in them, they would have been the happiest of all the sons of men. We ourselves, as a church, if we can fulfil the type, if we live with God in the midst of us, if he is our dwelling-place throughout all generations, if we fetch our supplies from him, if we move only at his bidding, if we intensely love him, we shall be a people to be envied by all who know us.

But, alas! a great difficulty comes in the way; and of that I am going to speak this morning, in order to the removal of it. Our text very plainly points out *the sad hindrance* in the way of our service: we need that our conscience be purged from dead works, or else we cannot serve the living God. Secondly, our text leads us to consider *the true purgation* from this evil: if the blood of bulls and of goats purged the flesh of men so that they could draw near to the visible tabernacle of God, much more shall the blood of Christ purge our conscience from all that spiritual defilement which prevents our heart-worship of God. When these two things are spoken of I shall ask you, in the last place, if time does not fail us, to consider *the kind of service* which we ought to render if we have been cleansed by such a costly purification, and purged from all conscience of dead works. Oh, living Spirit, help us now to think living thoughts, and so to carry on the worship of the living God while we are hearing thy word!

I. First, then, let us briefly consider THE SAD HINDRANCE WHICH LIES IN THE WAY OF THE SERVICE OF GOD. In the camp in the wil-

derness the law was that if a man touched a dead body he was made unclean by that touch; nay, if he only trod upon a dead bone in his daily walks, he was polluted by his accidental contact with death. If any person died in the tent all the family and the tent itself became at once defiled, and they must undergo purgation before the inhabitants could mingle with the rest of the congregation, much less could go up to the holy place of assembly. My brethren, we are all under the ban by coming into contact with spiritual death. The apostle does not say, purge your conscience from *evil* works, because he wanted to turn our minds to the type of defilement by death, and therefore he said, "dead works." I think he had a further motive; for he was not altogether indicating wilful transgressions of the law, but those acts which are faulty because they are not performed as the result of spiritual life. I see a difference between sinful works and dead works which we may perhaps be able to bring into light as we go on. Suffice it to say for the moment, that sin is the corruption which follows necessarily upon spiritual death. First, the work is dead, and soon it rots into actual sin.

Upon our consciences there rests, first of all, *a sense of past sin.* Even if a man wishes to serve God, yet until his conscience is purged, he feels a dread and terror of God which prevent his doing so. He has sinned, and God is just, and therefore he is ill at ease. The law is not to be trifled with; it is sent into the world armed with terrible sanctions, and the conscience when awakened makes us know that we cannot sin with impunity. "God is angry with the wicked every day; if he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready"; and the sinner, knowing this, asks, "How can I serve this terrible God?" He is alarmed when he thinks of the Judge of all the earth; for it is before that Judge that he will soon have to take his trial. He is as a man in chains, reserved unto the hour of terrible execution; and how can we serve this dreadful God? We tremble in the presence of an angry God, for that anger threatens us with destruction. Sin, like a dark cloud, darkens our spirit, and shuts us out from joy. It is impossible for any man rightly to serve God with a living, loving worship while he is conscious of guilt. Hence, brethren, we need the atoning sacrifice of Christ to purge the conscience; for the Lord will not be served by convicted criminals, neither can condemned rebels wish to serve him. He cannot look upon the rebellious with any pleasure till their iniquity is put away and their sin is covered. You see, then, that the first hindrance to holy service is our sense of guilt; and from this we must be wholly delivered: we must receive a new consciousness, a consciousness of perfect pardon and complete reconciliation, or else we cannot serve the living God.

On the back of this comes the consciousness that *we ourselves are sinful,* and inclined to evil. We say, and say rightly, "Who shall bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." How can we whose will is obstinate, whose judgment is darkened, whose affections are depraved, whose desires are selfish, whose thoughts are evil, how can we stand in the presence of Him before whom angels veil their faces as they cry, "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty"? Men who know that they are forgiven, yet nevertheless are seized with trembling in the

presence of the divine purity. They cry, "Woe is me! for I am a man of unclean lips." How shall we bear the vessels of the Lord if we are not clean? And clean we are not by nature. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place?" We feel that we have not that perfect purity of heart and cleanness of hands which would fit us for the holy place; nor can we ever be saved from this fear, so as to take up our heavenly priesthood and serve God, till the precious blood of Christ shall be applied to the conscience, nor until we feel that in Christ we are accounted righteous. Happy are we if we are believers in Jesus; for he hath washed us and we are clean every whit. Even our feet, though travel-stained, are now made clean, because he hath taken the ewer and the basin and hath washed our feet, and hath said to us, "Ye are clean." We may now enter into the most holy place without the slightest fear, since the Great High Priest of our profession hath himself purified us. We are accepted in the Beloved; "Christ is made of God unto us righteousness."

But, besides this consciousness of sin and sinfulness, we are conscious of *a measure of deficient life*. About us there is a body of death. Dead works are the things we most require to be purged from. Dead works need not be in themselves works of wilful sin. As the renowned Dr. John Owen has said, there were many things that the Jews would have to do about the dead which could not be censured, but, on the contrary, were to be praised; and yet these acts brought ceremonial defilement. A person is dead; someone must lay out the corpse, someone must array it for the funeral, someone must lift it into the coffin, someone must dig the grave, and cover up the poor clay with its fellow clay; these last offices must be attended to, yet they defiled all who performed them. Although they were works of humanity and of necessity, yet, according to the law, all who performed them were thereby rendered unclean. Without going into what the world calls actual sin, you and I may come into contact with spiritual death, nay, we carry death about us, from which we daily cry to be delivered. For instance, in prayer: our prayer in its form and fashion may be right enough, but if it lacks earnestness and importunity, it will be a dead work. A sermon may be orthodox and correct, but if it be devoid of that holy passion, that divine inspiration, without which sermons are but mere harangues, it is a dead work. An alms given to the poor is good as a work of humanity, but it will be only a dead work if a desire to be seen of men is found at the bottom of it. Like the almsgiving of the Pharisee, it will be a mockery of God. Without a spiritual motive the best work is dead. I confess that I never appear before you without a fear that my preaching may be a dead work among you. It must be so, as it comes from myself; its life must depend upon the spiritual power with which the Lord clothes it. Do you not think that very much of common Christian conversation is dead, or very near to it? Ye stand and sing, but your hearts do not sing: ye bow your heads in prayer, but you are not praying: ye read the Scripture, but it is not inspired to you, so as to breathe its own life into you. Even our meditations and thoughts about God's work may be mere intellectual exercises, and so may be devoid of that power which alone can make them living works, fit for the service of the living God. Beloved friends, we

want the precious blood of Christ to purge our consciences from this death and its working, and to lift us into holy and heavenly life. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. God accepteth not the dead sacrifice, but the living sacrifice. Even of old there were no fishes presented on his altar, because they could not come there alive: the victim must be brought alive to the horns of the altar, or God could not receive it. We must not bring our dead faith or our dead works as an offering unto God; our prayers without emotion, our praises without gratitude, our testimonies without sincerity, our gifts without love—all these will be dead, and consequently unacceptable. We must present a living sacrifice to the living God, or we cannot hope to be accepted; and for this reason we greatly need the blood of Christ to purge our conscience from dead works.

Do you not sometimes fear concerning your services that they have been altogether dead? When we are lukewarm we hold the golden cup to our God; but he receives it not when our service is dead and chill. Indeed, he saith of us when we are lukewarm, "I will spue thee out of my mouth." The Lord cannot endure a worship which is half dead: all worship must be presented at blood heat; the warmth of life must be there. Do you not fear that even when, as a whole, it is alive, large parts of our service may be dead? Even in the living body of our prayers may there not be a dead bone? Even in the living body of our praise may there not be mortification in parts? God help us. What poor creatures we are! Is there one good thing about us? Are we not imperfect in our best doings? Are not the sins of our holy things glaring before our consciences this day? Unless we are purged therefrom by the blood of Christ, who offered up himself without spot to God, how can we serve this living God, and be as priests and kings unto him?

Once more: I told you that the Israelites were defiled by even touching a dead bone, and this teaches us the easiness of being polluted. We have to come into *contact with evil* in our daily dealings with ungodly men. Can we think of them, can we speak to them, can we trade with them, without incurring defilement? Even if we grow indignant with evil practices, may there not be sin in our indignation? and when we reprove the custom of the trade, may we not become Pharisees in that very act? We are seldom exactly right; in avoiding one sin we drop into another; we flee from the lion, and a bear meets us. To keep the middle path of perfect holiness how difficult!

Nay, I go further: do we, as Christian men washed by Christ, ever associate with one another without a measure of defilement? Can we meet together at our homes and feel, when we separate, that everything we have said was seasoned with salt and ministered to edification? Is there not some taint about our purest friends; and does not the touch of that corruption which still remaineth, even in the regenerate, tend to defile us? Can we walk through such a charnel-house as this world without being defiled even unconsciously? Remember, under the Jewish law the man who was defiled and knew it not was still under penalty; and when he did discover it, he was made to bring his sacrifice. He needed the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer even for his sin of ignorance. If we have heard an evil thing, or read an evil thing, it has probably left some stain upon us though we perceive it not. All the

more surely it may be so because we do not see it; for that may but prove that the judgment has been depraved and the heart infected. The water of purification and the blood of atonement are needed day by day. Without these we cannot hope to minister before the Lord our God with acceptance.

II. Now, I want to show, in the second place, WHAT IS THE TRUE PURGATION FROM THIS EVIL. Under the law there were several methods of purification, but the apostle was not of a mind, on this occasion, to speak particularly of any one of them; and therefore he summed them them all up in these words: "The blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh." These things did purify the flesh, so that the man who had formerly contracted impurity might mix with his fellow-men in the congregation of the Lord. Now, if these matters were so effectual for the purifying of the flesh, well does the apostle ask, "How much more shall the blood of Christ purge our conscience from dead works?" Why does he say, "How much more?"

First, because it is *more truly purifying.* There was not really and truly anything of purification about the blood of bulls and of goats. Speaking very literally, the blood of bulls and of goats might defile a person. Falling upon any man it bespattered his garments. Who cared to have a smear of blood upon his brow, or on his hands? It was not in itself a thing that could actually purify. All the prescribed purifications were types and shadows of the true propitiation for sin. Now, when the Lord Jesus Christ took upon himself our human nature, and lived a life of perfection, and then made an offering of himself in death, as the Just for the unjust; then there was a real sacrifice made unto the Most High God. When the Lord Jesus gave his body, soul, and spirit; when in his entire nature he made himself a sacrifice for sin, "being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree;" then in that deed there was a real atonement made a true and effectual expiation was offered. Therefore he says "How much more?" if the shadow cleansed the flesh, how much more shall the substance cleanse the spirit?

Moreover, our Lord Christ offered *a much greater sacrifice.* Why doth the text here show the term "*Christ*"? The apostle Paul uses the name of our Lord with considerable variety: it is sometimes "Christ," sometimes "Jesus," sometimes "our Lord Jesus," sometimes "our Lord Jesus Christ," sometimes "Christ Jesus." But there is a reason for the use of each name wherever it occurs. It would be an instructive study for you to try to find out why in such a place our Lord is called "Christ" and not "Jesus," or "Jesus" and not "Christ." In this passage the name used is "Christ." One reason why the precious blood has such power to put away sin is because it is the blood of Christ, that is, of God's Anointed, God's Messiah, the Sent One of the Most High. Our Lord came not as an amateur, but he came with a commission, he came with an appointment and unction from the Holy One. If, therefore, the Lord Jesus Christ be offered a sacrifice for us, he is appointed to that end by God himself, and therefore he must be accepted of God. There is no will worship about Christ. He says, "Lo, I come to do thy will"; he did not come to do his own will, but the will

of him that sent him: hence there is a peculiar purifying power about all that he did, because he did it as Christ, the anointed of God.

Notice, it is not put concerning Christ that his life is purifying, though it had a wonderful relation thereto; nor is it said that his prayers are purifying, albeit everything is ascribable unto the intercession of our risen Lord; nor is it said that his resurrection is purifying; but the whole stress is laid upon "*the blood* of Christ," signifying thereby death, death with pain, death as a victim, death with reference to sin. "The blood is the life thereof," and "without shedding of blood there is no remission." It is by the blood of Christ that you and I have our consciences purged from dead works. Rejoice in Christ in glory, but put your trust in Christ crucified. Look with longing hope to his second coming; but for your purification rest upon his first coming. See in his agony and his death your joy and life. It is the blood of Christ that alone can make you fit to serve the living and true God.

Note what it was that Christ offered, and be sure that you lay great stress upon it. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered *himself?*" What a splendid word that is! Did he offer his blood? yes, but he offered "himself." Did he offer his life? yes, but he specially offered "himself." Now, what is "Christ"? The "anointed of God." In his wondrous complex nature he is God and man. He is prophet, priest, and king. He is—but time would fail me to tell you what he is; but whatever he is he offered himself. The entire Christ was offered by Christ. "He offered himself!" You cannot put it so strongly by the use of any other word. "He his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree." "Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it"; not his life on earth, not his life in heaven, nor his abilities and his thoughts and his works; but *himself* he gave. This is the alabaster box which was broken, the precious ointment of which doth perfume both earth and heaven, and makes the saints sweet unto the Lord their God, who smells upon them a sweet savour of rest in the offering up of Christ. He offered "himself"! Dwell much upon that word.

It is said in our text that this offering of himself was "*without spot.*" The sacrificial act by which he presented himself was a faultless one, without spot. There was nothing in what Christ was himself, and nothing in the way in which he offered himself, that could be objected to of God: it was "without spot." Now you see, brethren, why it is that it has such purifying power for us. God sent the Christ; this Christ offered up himself; and he offered himself without spot; and so we for whom this wondrous Christ was sent, for whom he made this matchless offering, for whom he made that offering without spot, we, I say, are accepted in the Beloved, made perfect in his perfection.

Further, it is added that he did this "*by the eternal Spirit.*" This does not refer to the Holy Ghost; otherwise the apostle would have said "by the Holy Spirit." It says, "By the eternal Spirit"; and the meaning is this, that his eternal Godhead gave to his offering of himself an extreme value which otherwise could not have been attached to it. He by the power of his Godhead offered up himself without spot.

Observe, then, the sacrifice was a spiritual one. You must never look at Christ's sacrifice in a carnal way, as though the mere drops of literal

blood, as a material substance, could have virtue in them for the purging of sin. Do not know Christ after the flesh : be no longer children, but understand spiritual things. It is true that our Lord had a material body and poured forth material blood; but the essence of his sacrifice lay in his will, intent, motive, and spirit. I once heard a dissertation upon what became of those drops of blood which fell to the ground on Calvary, and I felt that it was foolish talk. By the blood of Christ we mean his suffering unto death, the obedience which made him yield his life, and especially the will of his soul to suffer, and the object of his mind in suffering. When the bullock was brought up its blood was poured out ; but the bullock could not be a sacrifice in spirit ; the bullock had no intention to die, and no understanding of the reason of its death ; the bullock was not willing to die, and therefore it presented no sacrifice by the spirit. But Christ knew what he was, and why he was there, and why he must die, and he gave his willing assent thereto. He entered with his whole heart into the substitution which involved obedience unto death. "For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross." It was by his spirit that he offered up a true and real sacrifice; for he says, "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart."

But then you must not forget that this spirit was divine—"by the eternal Spirit." The spirit of Christ was an eternal spirit, for it was the Godhead. There was conjoined with his deity the natural life of a perfect man ; but the eternal spirit was his highest self. His Godhead willed that he should die, and concurred in the death of the manhood, so that by the eternal spirit he offered himself. The blood which he shed was the blood of God, for thus we read : "Feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." Of course "blood" as a physical, material thing cannot be the blood of God ; but viewing it as what it means—his sufferings, his griefs, his woes—these were consented to by the divine spirit of Christ; and so by the eternal spirit he offered himself to God. Because he is the Second Person of the adorable Trinity in unity, the suffering and death of his humanity had in them a potency of purgation by which he cleanses our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Brethren, I never feel it hard to trust my sinful soul with the great sacrifice of Christ ; I feel, on the contrary, that if I had all your souls within my body and all your sins heaped upon me, and all the sins of all the redeemed blackening my conscience, I could now readily trust to that divine sacrifice for the taking away of all that guilt. What limit can you set to the merit of one who by the eternal spirit offered up himself? What bound can there be to a sacrifice divine? You can no more set a limit to our Lord's sacrifice than to Godhead itself.

Once more, I must call to your notice the use of that word "eternal," —"who by the eternal Spirit"—for it gives to the offering of Christ an endless value. It can never cease to operate, for he offered up himself by the "Eternal Spirit." There is as much purging power in the death of our Lord to-day as in that hour when for the first time he appeared in the presence of God for us. The blood of the bullock was a temporary thing ; the "ashes of an heifer" could not last for ever, but the merits of Christ are the merits of one who ever lives. His merits ever

abide; for they are the merits of an Eternal Person, who by his own Spirit offered up himself a sacrifice for sin.

Now, all this tends to make us feel how clean are they who are purged by this sacrifice which our Lord offered once for all to God. Need I call your attention to the fact that he offered himself "*to God*"? Yes, I must; for of late some have blasphemously said that the sacrifice was made to the devil. To mention such profanity is to condemn it.

Once more upon this point: as I have shown you that the sacrifice of Christ was more real and greater, so I want you to notice that *it was better applied;* for the ashes of an heifer mixed with water were sprinkled on the bodies of the unclean; the blood of bulls and of goats was sprinkled upon the flesh, but neither of them could reach the heart. It is not possible for a material thing to touch that which is immaterial; but the sufferings of Christ, as I have explained them, offered up through his Eternal Spirit, were not only of a corporeal but of a spiritual kind, and they reach, therefore, to the cleansing of our spirit.

That precious blood comes home to us in this way: first, we understand somewhat of it. The Israelite, when he was purged by the ashes of the red cow, could only say to himself, "I am made clean by these ashes, because God has appointed that I shall be, but I do not know why." But you and I can say that we are made clean through the blood of Christ, because there is in that blood an inherent efficacy; there is in the vicarious suffering of Christ on our behalf an inherent power to honour the law of God, and to put away sin. Because we can somewhat understand the cleansing given us in Christ, it has a greater power upon our conscience, and the better prepares us to serve God.

Then again, we appreciate and approve of this way of cleansing. The Israelite could not tell why the ashes of a red heifer purified him; he did not object to it, but he could not express any great appreciation of the method. We, as we see our Lord suffering in our stead, fall at his feet in reverent wonder. We love the method of salvation by substitution; we approve of expiation by the Mediator. No truth charms my own spirit like the truth of atonement by vicarious suffering, that suffering presented together with his death by our Lord Jesus Christ. I feel my conscience is quieted by every drop of that blood; the method of federal headship commends itself to me: I see righteousness and grace commingled in it, and thus I am helped to serve the living God.

Further, brethren, it comes home to us this way: we read in the word of God that "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life," and we say to ourselves, "Then we have everlasting life, for we have believed in him." We read, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin," and our conscience whispers, "We are cleansed from all sin." Conscience finds rest and peace, and our whole consciousness becomes that of a forgiven and accepted person, with whom God is well pleased. Our conscience, instead of condemning us, perceives the justice of the way by which we are absolved, and leads up our peace of heart into full assurance of faith. So you see, brethren, that what the blood of bulls and of goats could not do, the blood of Christ has done; it has passed beyond the flesh, which, indeed, it has never touched in our case, and it has sanctified the heart, and calmed the spirit, thus preparing us to serve the Lord. The blood of Christ has purified us to

the centre, it has purged the core of the heart, it has cleansed our spirit, our mind, our memory, our thought, our intellect, our affections, and we are clean; and therefore are we meet to exercise a holy priesthood before the living God.

III. This brings me to my last head, which is this: consider THE KIND OF SERVICE WHICH WE NOW RENDER. After so much preparing, how shall we behave ourselves in the house of God?

I am not speaking to you who have never been purged from dead works by the application of the precious blood of Christ; for you cannot serve God, you are forbidden to come into his presence, or to stand among his saints. You are in quarantine, even as lepers put forth from the camp. Go home and set a red cross upon your door, and write over it, "Lord have mercy upon us." That would best befit your unclean condition. As Joshua said to Israel, even so say I unto you, "Ye cannot serve the Lord: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God." Ye must be born again ere ye can be acceptable unto him; for as ye are, an infection is upon all your doings, and ye may not hope that he will accept anything at your hands.

But to you who have had that blood applied to your conscience by the Spirit of God, even to you I speak. You should present unto the Lord the constant worship of living men. You see it is written, "Purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God." You are not at this day likely to die in order to prove your love to God; but if you are ever called to it, you must be prepared to lose your lives for Christ's sake. But what you have to do is to "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God." Now a living sacrifice is much more difficult of presentation than a slain one. I believe there are thousands of men who could go to the stake and die, or lay their necks on the block to perish with a stroke for Christ, who nevertheless find it hard work to live a holy, consecrated life. The act of one moment, however painful, must be much easier than that service which is to run through a series of years, until life itself shall close. But if the Lord Jesus gave himself for you, will you not give yourselves for him? If he died for you by his eternal spirit, will you not live for him by that new spirit with which he has quickened you? Are you not under bonds to serve him? From this time forth, you should not have a pulse that does not beat to his praise, nor a hair on your head that is unconsecrated to his name, nor a single moment of your time which is not used for his glory. Yes, brothers, sisters, it must be a lifelong sacrifice that we now present unto him that liveth for ever.

Should not our service be rendered in the full strength of our new life? Let us have no more dead works, no more dead singing, no more dead praying, no more dead preaching, no more dead hearing. "Oh," said one, when he heard a sermon, "it was very good, if it had been alive." Dead-and-alive Christianity is poor stuff. No dish ever comes to table which is so nauseous as cold religion. Put it away. Neither God nor man can endure it. Let us have cakes hot from the oven, manna fresh from heaven, living waters leaping from the rock. Stale godliness is ungodliness. Let our religion be as warm, and constant, and natural as the flow of the blood in our veins. A living God must be served in a living way.

Are we to be excited, therefore? Yes, if need be. What can excite a man like the grand sublimities of eternity? But if you are not excited with any carnal excitement, if principle rules rather than passion, it will be so much the better. Yet let it be living principle; principle alive with love. There is such a thing as an excitement which is dead spiritually. The fury of the flesh is not the life of God. Energy of mind is a distinct thing from being strong in the Lord. We need a steady, healthy pulsation of spiritual life to keep us to such service of the Lord as becometh saints and is worthy of our high calling. This comes only from having our conscience purged from dead works.

And, dear friends, do keep in mind that you are henceforth to "serve the living God." You that are acquainted with the Greek will find that the kind of service here mentioned is not that which the slave or servant renders to his master, but a worshipful service such as priests render unto God. We that have been purged by Christ are to render to God the worship of a royal priesthood. It is ours to present prayers, thanksgivings, and sacrifice; it is ours to offer the incense of intercession; it is ours to light the lamp of testimony and furnish the table of shew-bread. Ye that are the sons of God are all the sons of Levi this day; yes, you are the true seed of Aaron, the priesthood is with you, even with you who worship God in the spirit and have no confidence in the flesh. You that believe in Christ, and are made pure by his blood, it is for you to live as if you wore the snow-white robes of the priests of the house of Aaron—your garments should be vestments and your conversation a perpetual priesthood unto God.

I close by noticing how this precious blood of Christ will work all this in us. It will operate upon us thus: when our conscience is perfectly pure from sin, and we know that we are forgiven and accepted in the Beloved, then how happy we shall be! and there is no service so acceptable to God as that which is joyfully rendered. When it is a joy to us to serve him, then it is a joy to him to be served; when it is a delight to us to honour God, then God delights in such honour. He seeks not slaves to grace his throne. When we know that we are perfectly forgiven, then we are full of gratitude, we feel that we must serve God, not because of anything we are to get for it, but because we long to do so. This unselfish service he gladly accepts. To give play to our emotions we feel that we must glorify him: then we serve God truly, for that which is born of love is living. Loving works are living works. Without love works are dead. When love abides in the soul, obedience is real and true, but not else. When his glorious name is honey in the mouth, and music in the ear, and heaven in the heart, then we worship him in the manner which he accepts, even in the same manner as the angels in glory who see his face and do his commandments. It is the cleansing blood which brings us near enough to do this.

This precious blood of Christ has now given us perfect peace with God, and therefore we can serve him without fear. You cannot serve an enemy; while you hate him you cannot please him; but our enmity to God is slain; he is our friend, our father and our God. His will is our will, his designs are our designs. As far as the little can keep pace with the great, and the minute with the infinite, we run parallel with

God; and if we ever quit the lines for a moment we are in misery till we get back again. What the Lord aims at we aim at, what he desires we desire. Is Christ's coming God's ultimatum? so it is ours, and we cry, "Even so, come Lord Jesus!" Shall "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ"? it is our last, best, highest prayer. Thus are we truly serving the Lord.

See ye not, then, how the washing of the precious blood has made us partakers of the service of heaven? How close it has brought us to God! In what amity and accord we walk with him! With what sympathy we enter into all that he does! With what intense delight we joy in him through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have received the atonement! How I wish that every soul here believed in Jesus! O that you would do so at once. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Hebrews ix. 1—28; x. 1—22.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—84 (Song III.), 51 (Version II.), 395.

Lay preachers who have little time to spare would derive valuable assistance from Mr. Spurgeon's new volume, entitled "My Sermon Notes." The double volume, containing outlines from the Old Testament, costs only 5s. It may be had of Messrs. Passmore and Alabaster, and all booksellers. It would be a very acceptable present to any minister.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

BEFORE SERMON, AT SERMON, AND AFTER SERMON.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JUNE 28TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."—James i. 21, 22.

BRETHREN, it is a good thing to be under the sound of the word of God. Even if the very lowest motive should induce persons to come to hear the gospel, it is nevertheless a good thing that they should come. We have heard of some who have even come to steal, and yet the word of God has stolen into their hearts. In many cases in the olden times spies were sent to hear the Protestant divines who preached the gospel, and these took notes of all that was said, with a view to accuse them of false doctrine, that they might be punished; yet in several cases the spies themselves were converted. Such is the power of the gospel of Christ, that it wooeth and winneth even its greatest enemies. He that comes near to its fire, even with the intent to quench it, may find himself overcome by its heat.

Master Hugh Latimer, in his quaint manner, when exhorting people to go to church, tells of a woman who could not sleep for many nights, notwithstanding that drugs had been given to her; but she said that if they would take her to her parish church she could sleep there, for she had often enjoyed a quiet slumber under the sermon; and he goes the length of saying that if people even come to the sermon to sleep, it is better than not to come at all; for, he adds, in his fine old Saxon, "they may be caught napping." It is even so. A sick man doeth well to live where there are physicians, for one day he may be healed. If men are in the heat of a battle they may be wounded: if they come where gospel arrows are shot they may fall under them. Plants that grow in the open are likely to be watered when the shower falls. We dare not say to any man who wills to enter the house of prayer, "Thou must not come, because thy motive is gross and low." Nay, thou art welcome, anyhow. Who knoweth but that, being in the way, God may meet with thee. Being where his truth is preached, thou mayest hear it; and "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

Yet it will strike you at once that though it be well to come to the hearing of the word in any case, yet it is better to come in a better way. We should endeavour to gather the most we can from the means of grace, and not pluck at them at random. A farmer may feel that there will be sure to be some crop upon his land if he doth but seed it; yet, if he be a wise man, he is not satisfied with a bare crop; but he manureth his land heavily, and tilleth it well, that it may bring forth a large return to him, for in these times the largest harvest is no more than he needeth. So, my brethren, let us so use the holy ordinance of preaching that we may extract the largest possible amount of gold from the ore. Let us so come into the solemn assembly that we may hope to meet with God there, for this is the chief end of our gathering together; and let us so behave ourselves before the coming, and in the coming, and after the coming, to the sanctuary, that we may gain the greatest possible profit by our coming together. To hear the word of the Lord is often made of the Spirit of God to be life to dead souls, and the most eminent means of further quickening to those who are already alive unto God. Let us not lose a grain of the blessing through our own fault. The word of the Lord is precious in these days; let us not trifle with it.

This morning, I shall handle my text with the earnest design of teaching you how to hear. Oh, that the Spirit of God may graciously help me! First, let us note what to do *before sermon*: "Lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." Secondly, let us learn how to behave *during sermon*: "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." And thirdly, here is the instruction for *after sermon*: "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

I. Let us consider the fit and proper preparation for listening to the gospel, or what is to be done BEFORE HEARING. It will strike every man who thinks about it, that there should be some preparation of the heart in coming to the worship of God, and to the hearing of the gospel. Consider who he is in whose name we gather, and surely we cannot rush together without thought. Consider whom we profess to worship, and we shall not hurry into his presence as men run to a fire. Moses, the man of God, was warned to put off his shoes from off his feet when God only revealed himself in a bush; how should we prepare ourselves when we come to him who reveals himself in Christ Jesus his dear Son? There should be no stumbling into the place of worship half-asleep, no roaming thither as if it were no more than going to a play-house. We cannot expect to profit much if we bring with us a swarm of idle thoughts and a heart crammed with vanity. If we are full of folly, we may shut out the truth of God from our minds. We should make ready to receive what God is so ready to bestow. If he was condemned who came to the wedding-feast not having on a wedding-garment, what shall we say of those who habitually come into the festivals of our Lord and never think of being meet to be partakers of his royal dainties? What shall we say of those who defile the temple of God by never seeking to have their souls washed from the filthiness of their sin? Certainly there should be a serious preparation when a sinful creature draws nigh to the most holy God.

Brethren, when I think of our engagements throughout the week, who of us can feel fit to come into the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High? I mean not into these tabernacles made with hands, but into the inner spiritual temple of communion with God. How shall we come unto God until we are washed? After travelling so miry a road as that which runs through this foul world, can we come unto God without shaking the dust from off our feet? Can we be busy with earthly cares all the six days of the week and be ready for the holy Sabbath without a thought? I trow not. Even in the heathen temples before the solemn mysteries began the herald cried, "Far hence, ye profane! Far hence, ye profane!" and should not some herald cry to our wandering thoughts, "Far hence, vain thoughts, for God is here!" When the hour is come for drawing near unto the glorious Lord before whom angels veil their faces as they cry, "Holy, holy, holy," it becomes us to be devout and humble, holy and earnest. Yes, brethren, if we were always occupied with divine worship, if we never knew thought or care except for his glory, if we were altogether dissociated from the entanglements and defilements of the world, I should not be so earnest to speak of preparation before hearing the word; but, alas! it is not so; we are men of unclean lips, and we dwell among a people of unclean lips. We have not yet come into the holy country where every one that saluteth us is either saint or angel. We have not yet cut off all the Canaanites, but we have need to watch against them daily. Because of the sin which dwelleth in us and around us, we have need to wash ourselves in the laver at the tabernacle door before we may come near unto the Most High.

There is a common consent among mankind that there should be some preparedness for worship. I see the visible signs of it here to-day. Before the Sabbath dawned you began to prepare clean linen and brighter garments than those of common days. It is but an outward and common matter; still, within the shell there lieth a kernel. Man putteth off his ordinary week-day garments and puts on his best apparel for the Sabbath, because by instinct he feels that he should pay some reverence to his God. I fear me this change of clothing full often degenerates into a wish to appear well before your fellow-men, but the underlying meaning should be this: "I am going up this day to the worship of my God. I will not go, therefore, either in uncleanness of body or of apparel, but will put on the best raiment, that I may show respect to my God and to the assemblies of his house." My counsel to you is, cleanse your hearts rather than your garments. Go before God in newness of spirit rather than in newness of clothing. If of old the prophet said, "Rend your heart, and not your garments," so may I say to-day, Put on the garments of righteousness and holiness by the grace of Christ Jesus our Lord, far rather than external garments, which do but adorn the flesh. Yet, I say, even in that change of raiment there is an admission that there should be God and to worship his holy name. God grant we may not be forgetful some kind of special preparation, when we go up to hear the word of of such fitting preparedness.

In making this preparation our text tells us that there are *some things to be laid aside.* What saith it? "Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness." Some things must be removed ere the

word of God can be received. And what are these things? The text mentions *all filthiness*. Now sin of every kind is filthiness. It does not strike the most of men so; they call it pleasure; I have even known them think it ornament. But in the judgment of the Spirit of God, who speaketh here by his servant James, every sin is filthiness. In the sight of every renewed man all sin is filthiness and nothing better. Ever since the day when the Spirit of God took the scales from off his eyes, the godly man sees sin to be a *foul* thing; abominable in the sight of a holy God. Sin in the thoughts is filthiness of the thoughts, sin in words is filthiness of speech; sin in action is filthiness in the life. Everywhere the transgression of the law is a foul and polluting thing, which neither God nor good men can bear. Now, brethren, in coming before God by the help of his Spirit every sin must be confessed, forsaken, and hated. By faith in the precious blood of Jesus it must be washed out, for we cannot come before God with acceptance while iniquity is indulged. We must remain apart from God till we are apart from filthiness. Filth, you know, is a *debasing* thing, meet only for beggars and thieves; and such is sin. Filth is *offensive* to all cleanly persons. We cannot bear close contact with a person who neglects the washing of his body or of his clothes, so as to become a living dunghill. However poor a man is he might be clean; and when he is not, he becomes a common nuisance to those who speak with him, or sit near him. If bodily filthiness is horrible to us, what must the filthiness of sin be to the pure and holy God! I cannot attempt to express the abomination of sin to God. He hates it with all his soul. If we are to be acceptable before God, there must be no keeping up of favourite sins, no sparing of darling lusts, no providing for secret iniquities: our service will be filthiness before God if our hearts go after our sins. He saith, "Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord." He would not have the vessels of his sanctuary touched with filthy fingers. Have we well considered this? Lay aside, then, all filthiness unless you wish to arouse the wrath of God. If we ourselves are offensive to God, all we do becomes offensive to him. Remember how it is written, that "the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." The Lord's acceptance is first to the person, and then to the sacrifice—to Abel first, and to his offering afterwards. If God hath no delight in a man's person, then hath he no delight in his services. Think not, ye unclean, that your hymns and praises, however sweetly they are sung, can be music in his ear! Think not that your forms of prayer can ever ascend like sweet perfume before him: they are a stench unto him, and an abomination, so long as ye yourselves are not washed from your filthiness. The filthiness of sin is to be put aside if we would hear the word aright.

Moreover, sin is not only offensive, but it is *dangerous*. We have learned at last, I hope, though some are still ignorant of the fact, that filthiness means disease. Men begin to see that unless we are clean we cannot be healthy. He who harbours filth is making a hot-bed for the germs of disease, and thus he is the enemy of his family and of his neighbourhood. The filthy man is a public poisoner, a suicide, and a murderer. Sin is the greatest conceivable danger to a man's own soul: it makes a man to be dead while he lives, yea, corrupt before he is dead.

Sin is a mortal disease, and he that bears it about him is not far from hell: while he continues to love it, he can never enter heaven. Will youcome before God and tread his courts with this leprosy upon your foreheads? Will you bring your infectious diseases into his temple. They must be laid apart. Oh, for grace to do this!

There are three sins at least that are intended here, and one is *covetousness*. Hence the desire of unholy gain is called filthy lucre, because it leads men to do dirty deeds which else they would not think of. If the lust of wealth enters into the heart, it rots it to the core. The apostle cries, "Your gold and your silver are cankered": truly, the man becomes cancered and cankered too. Now when a man's heart is full of filth, when the desire to get gain, and to get it anyhow, is strong on a man, he is in a very unfit condition to profit by hearing the gospel. You cannot get the gospel into him; a golden bolt fastens the door. He is somewhat in the condition of the sea captain I have heard of who went out after whales, and when he landed and heard the gospel preached, he said to the man of God, "Sir, it was of no use your preaching to me, for all the while I was thinking about where I should find a whale. There is no room for anything else in my mind but whales. I must have whales, and for the time I can think of nothing else but whales." So it must be with the man who is hot for gain: his farm and his merchandise are in his heart crowding out everything else. He who has a stall in Vanity Fair is in an unfit state to buy the truth, since his merchandise is vanity. A covetous man is an idolater, and cannot receive the gift of God till he has mastered his bosom sin. He is too foul to draw near to the Lord. God help him to escape from the idolatry of riches.

Then, with peculiar correctness, *lustfulness* may be spoken of as filthiness. I need not enlarge. Doth not nature itself teach us that the indulgence of our animal passions, whatever form that indulgence may take, whether of drunkenness or lewdness, is a condition that unfits man for the reception of the pure word of God? How should spotless purity come and dwell with that man whose life is brutish indulgence? How should the thrice holy Spirit come and dwell in that heart which is a den of unclean desires? Did the men of Sodom profit by the teaching of Lot? Shall a man come from the chamber of lust to the house of the Lord? No, brethren. We must lay apart all filthiness if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth.

But in the connection of my text the filthiness meant is especially *anger*. Read it, and you will see. "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God; wherefore lay apart all filthiness." Some persons when they are angry will say things that never ought to be repeated, or even said for the first time. It was so no doubt in James's day even more than in our own; then angry men let fly horrible epithets and abominable insinuations which were indeed a superfluity of naughtiness. Now, the child of God is to subdue his anger, wrath, and malice. How can you accept the word of peace while you are at enmity with your brother? How can you hope to find forgiveness under the hearing of the word when you forgive not those that have trespassed against you? We would have you pray ere you come into this house on the Sabbath morning or evening, and see to it that you come in the spirit of gentleness and meekness; only thus will you receive the

engrafted word. The wrath of man is so filthy a thing, that it cannot work the righteousness of God; nor is it likely that the righteousness of God will be wrought in the heart that is hot like an oven with passion and malice. A revengeful, bitter, and malicious spirit is little likely to imbibe the sweet forgiving spirit of the gospel. God help us, then, to lay apart all filthiness, and especially all enmity.

But it is added, "*and superfluity of naughtiness.*" What does that mean? Any kind of naughtiness in a child of God is superfluous: iniquity ought not to be within him. "Superfluity of naughtiness," or the outpouring of evil, is unnecessary; it is an excrescence upon a child of God. The phrase here used differs not in meaning from the first epithet of the text: it gives another view of the same thing. You have seen a rose tree which, perhaps, was bearing very few roses, and you half wondered why. It was a good rose, and planted in good soil, but its flowers were scanty. You looked around it, and by-and-by you perceived that suckers were growing up from its root. Now, these suckers come from the old, original briar, on which the rose had been grafted, and this rose had a superfluity of strength which it used in these suckers. These superfluities, or overflows, took away from the rose the life which it required, so that it could not produce the full amount of flowers which you expected from it. These superfluities of naughtiness that were coming up here and there were to the injury of the tree. Children of God, you cannot serve the Lord if you are giving your strength to any form of wrong; your naughtinesses are springing from the briar stock of your old nature, and the best thing to do is to cut off those suckers and stop them as much as possible, so that all the strength may return into the rose, and the lovely flowers of grace may abound. Oh, that God's people, when they come up here on the Sabbath-day, may first have undergone that divine pruning which shall take away the superfluity of naughtiness, for there cannot be grafting without a measure of pruning. The gardener takes off from a certain part of the tree a shoot of the old stock, and then he inserts the graft. There must be a removal of superfluities in order that we may receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls. This is what is to be put away.

The garments spotted with the flesh and infected with disease are to be taken off and *laid apart.* We are to wear them no more, if we desire to profit by the word which we hear. We are not to lay *up* these to put them on again, but lay them *apart* among the offal of Tophet's fire, with the strong desire never to touch them again. To the fires we condemn these filthy things. What have we to do with filthiness, now that we have been begotten by the will of God to be the firstfruits of his creatures? You who are the children of a holy God, what have you to do with naughtiness, or any such superfluity? God help you to shake off sin as Paul shook off the viper into the fire.

Why is this? Why is a man as he comes to hear the gospel to see to this? I take it because all these evil things *preoccupy* the mind. Whether it be covetousness, or lewdness, or anger, in addition to the pollution which these bring, they also possess the thoughts, so that they are not likely to be blessed while hearing the word. These are the rocks which prevent the seed from entering the mind, these the

birds which devour that which is sown, these the weeds which choke the upspringing shoots. Wherefore lay these aside. If you bring your measures to this place filled to the brim with chaff, how can you expect to have them filled with wheat? If we come here with this filthiness about us, how can we expect that the pure and incorruptible word shall be sweet to us?

Moreover, sin *prejudices* against the gospel. A man says, "I do not enjoy the sermon." How can you? What have you been enjoying during the week? What flavour did last night leave in your mouth? "I cannot bear that man," says one; and if you could, it would be an evidence that the man was not faithful. Can Ahab love Elijah? I remember seeing one get up and go out in hot indignation at what I had said, which happened to come personally home to him, though the man was a stranger to me. What I had said was the pure truth of God, and I could not be sorry that an ill-living man was indignant at it, since this was the only homage that such as he could pay to purity. Had he but known it, there was therein a manifestation to himself of what his nature was, and in what condition he was. Think you Christ's servants desire to please those who will not please God? "Oh," said one to a Puritan divine, "my lord heard you this morning, and he is mightily offended at your remarks upon profane language; for my lord is given to drop an oath now and then in his ordinary speech." What said the Puritan divine? He answered, "Sir, if your lord offends my Lord, then your lord ought to be offended, and I cannot say less than I have said." If any men are offended with the gospel it is because they themselves offend against God. It is almost invariably the case that when persons grow sceptical who once professed to be religious, and begin picking at this and that, there is a secret evil in their lives which they thus try to cover from their own consciences. The devil tempts them to rail at the ministry because the gospel presses hard upon their guilty consciences, and makes them feel uneasy in their sins. If you are to hear God's word with pleasure and profit to yourselves, you must "lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness"; for these things will prejudice you against the word of God, and render you incapable of that lively appreciation of it which is so needful to profiting thereby. God bless these words of mine, and may many of you who have come carelessly here at different times, henceforth seek to come with preparedness into the assembly of God's people.

II. Secondly, I will talk a little about DURING HEARING. How shall we act while listening to the word? "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." The first thing, then, is *receive*. That word "receive" is a very instructive gospel word; it is the door through which God's grace enters to us. We are not saved by working, but by receiving; not by what we give to God, but by what God gives to us, and we receive from him. In the hearing of the word there should be a receiving of it, not into the ear only, but into the understanding, into the heart, into the conscience, together with a laying-up of this good treasure in the memory and the affections. Ye must receive the word, or it cannot bless you. For look ye, sirs, the word of God is a feast; but what comes of it if a man only looks at the banquet? Shall he not go away as empty as he came if he doth not

receive it? The preaching of the word is as a shower from heaven; but what happens to the soil if the rain-drops fall, but none are absorbed into the soil? Of what avail is the shower if none is drunk in by the thirsty furrows? A medicine may have great healing power, but if it is not received, then it does not purge the inward parts of the body. There must be a receiving of any good thing before the goodness of it can be ours. I do love, when I read the Bible, or hear the word, to throw the doors of my soul wide open; ay, and to open all the windows of my heart. My soul cries, "Come in, most blessed Spirit; come in, divine Life. Thou shalt not say there is no room for thee in the inn; come, take possession of every chamber of this house of mine, and be thou Master of it henceforth and for ever." I pray you, my brethren, do not block up your souls against the incoming tide of the gospel. On the contrary, break down the dams, and let the river flow into you till you are filled therewith. Receive the word. Many men are not profited by the word, because it does not penetrate them, but is like water flowing down a slab of marble. Truth must soak into the heart if it is to bless the heart. May the blessed Spirit give us a sweet receptiveness of the truth, for else it is of no avail to hear it.

Then it is added, "receive *with meekness*." Many do not receive the gospel because they are not of a meek and teachable spirit: they come up to God's house, but the only seat they will occupy therein is the judgment-seat. One would imagine them to be the god of God by their bold talk. Judge not the word of God, I charge you. Ye may judge *me* as you like; small matter shall that be to me; for we are not anxious as to men's judgment, but our judgment is with the living God. If the preacher truly declares the word of God, woe unto the man who sits in judgment upon it: this same word shall judge him at the last great day. We stand at the bar to be tried by God's word, and searched, and sifted; but woe unto us if, rejecting every pretence of meekness, we ascend the tribunal, and summon God himself before us. The spirit of critics ill becomes sinners when they seek mercy of the Lord. His message must be received with teachableness of mind. When you know it is God's word, it may upbraid you, but you must receive it with meekness. It may startle you with its denunciations: but receive it with meekness. It may be, there is something about the truth which at the first blush does not commend itself to your understanding; it is perhaps too high, too terrible, too deep; receive it with meekness. This is not the spirit of the present age, but it is the spirit which the living God requires of us. It is by receiving with meekness that we receive the truth in the power of it, and so it is able to save our souls. Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. The door of heaven is open to those who sit at Jesus' feet, and learn of him. Thou art not his servant unless he is thy Master. Thou canst not be said to be his disciple if thou dost question his teaching; for in the questioning of Christ's teaching lies the rejection of his Person. To doubt Jesus is treason against the authority he claims over every human heart. Receive with meekness if you would be blessed with grace.

What is this which is to be received? "Receive with meekness *the engrafted word*." We are not bidden to receive with meekness men's

words, for they are many, and there is little in them; but receive with meekness God's word, for it is one, and there is power in each word which proceedeth out of his mouth. One word of God created the heavens and the earth; by the word of God the heavens still stand; one word of his shall ere long shake not only earth but also heaven; therefore, hear with meekness that word; that word which testifies of sin, and of its sure punishment; that word which testifies of grace most large and free, and of an atonement provided by the Only Begotten Son of the Father, by which sin is put away in consistency with justice and holiness. Receive with meekness the word of the Lord in its entirety and unity. Reject no part of it, but receive the whole.

Any little particle of God's word, so far as we know it, is precious, and should be highly esteemed of us. The odds and ends, and corners, and fragments of the divine word are to be received by you and by me; and there is a lack of meekness in us if we begin to pick and choose, and cut and carve the divine word. Who are we that we should say, "This or that is not essential"? Who art thou, O man, that thou shouldest decide what is essential or otherwise? He who gave the word did not write trifles. It is essential that thou receive the word of the Lord as supreme and perfect; and it is essential that thou be lost if thou dost wilfully reject any portion of that which the Most High deigns to reveal to men. Receive with meekness the one, only, and indivisible word of the Lord.

It is called "the *engrafted* word." The Revised Version has "the implanted word," which is, perhaps, more literal than the Authorized translation; and it puts in the margin, "the inborn word," which gives another idea, and yet conveys a like sense. I will keep to our old and well-beloved version, and read it "engrafted word." When a graft is to be made, the first thing is to make a cut or gash. Nobody ever received the word of God into his heart to be engrafted there without being cut and wounded by the truth. It needs two wounds to make a graft; you wound the tree, and you wound that better tree which is to be grafted in. Is it not a blessed grafting when a wounded Saviour comes into living contact with a wounded heart? when a bleeding heart is engrafted with a bleeding Saviour? Engrafting implies that the heart is wounded and opened, and then the living word is laid in and received with meekness into the bleeding, wounded soul of the man. There is the gash, and there is the space opened thereby. Here comes the graft: the gardener must establish a union between the tree and the graft. This new life, this new branch, is inserted into the old stem, and they are to be livingly joined together. At first they are bound together by the gardener, and clay is placed about the points of junction; but soon they begin to grow into one another, and then only is the grafting effectual. This new cutting grows into the old, and it begins to suck up the life of the old, and change it so that it makes new fruit. That bough, though it be in the grafted tree, is altogether of another sort. Now we want the word of God to be brought to us after a similar fashion: our heart must be cut and opened, and then the word must be laid into the gash till the two adhere, and the heart begins to hold to the word, to believe in it, to hope in it, to love it, to grow to it, to grow into it, and to bear fruit accordingly. "Christ liveth in me," said the

apostle. Is not that a wonderful thought? The daily incarnation of Christ in the believer, or in other words, the new eternal life, living in us, and producing fruit after its own kind, while we live in it, and the fruit is our own. Christ is come in all the newness of his life, and is living in me. Oh, blessed grafting! "Receive with meekness the engrafted word."

Once more, you are to receive it by faith, for you are to regard the word as being *able*. Believe in the power of God's word, receive it as being fully able to save your souls from beginning to end. Two ways it does this: by putting away your sin as you accept the blood and righteousness of Christ, and by changing your nature as you accept the Lord Jesus to be your Master and your Lord, your life and your all. There is such potency in the word of God, that if it be received into the heart, it will effectually save the soul: it will not merely give you a hope of being saved, but really save you; save you now, save you through life, save you to all eternity. Oh, with what ears ought men to listen to a word which can save their souls! With what open mouths ought they to drink in this living water! How wisely might we wish to be like sponges, to suck it all up; or like Gideon's fleece, to be saturated with the dew of heaven! How we ought to wish to be like the ploughed ground which is broken up and pulverised, so that every drop that falls may soak into it! Oh, that the new life that is come to us would put out the old life of the flesh, so that our life should no longer be after the old fashion, but in all newness of power! Let us rejoice to have the word engrafted in us.

This is how to behave at sermon. Oh, what need have we of the Holy Ghost to help us to hear the truth as well as to prepare us before we hear it!

III. Lastly, and very briefly, let us think of AFTER SERMON. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

First, the command is *positive*—"Be ye doers of the word." Oh, dear sirs, I come to this pulpit oftentimes and speak with you, but as I come hither my heart is more and more burdened with this desire: that mine may not be an unprofitable ministry unto you. I shall be useless to you unless you are doers of the word as well as hearers. Sirs, ye have heard about repentance and the putting away of filthiness: repent, then, and let your filthiness be put away. May God the Holy Ghost lead you to do so—not to hear about it, but do it. Ye have heard us preach continually concerning faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you know all about believing; but have you believed? Sirs, have you believed? If not, to what avail is it for us to cry, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"? We are to admonish you concerning all those blessed duties which spring out of that living faith which works by love; but it is nothing to hear about these virtues unless you possess them. Doing far surpasses hearing. I believe that with a very little knowledge and great doing of what we know, we may attain to a far higher degree of grace than with great knowledge and little doing of what we know. The man who knows how to keep shop makes no profit by his knowledge if he does not keep any shop. The doctor who knows how to cure the sick is not therefore a healer if he never has a patient. The man who knows how to teach children but never does teach them, is not an

instructor of youth. If a schoolmaster teaches the little he does know, he may be a better teacher than a great philosopher who keeps all his wisdom to himself. We value clouds by their rain, and men by their actual doings. The world is always looking to the church, not so much to hear her teachings as to see her doings. Few ask, "What is the doctrine taught at such a meeting-house?" The ungodly world cries, "Bother the doctrine. What good is done there?" If the people who attend there are mean, false, hypocritical, the world condemns the tree which yields such fruit. The bulk of men do not read the Bible, but they read you; and if they do not come to hear the minister preach the gospel, yet they say, "These people who hear him are no better than other people, and why should we trouble to go and listen to him?" The minister gets the blame which should rightly belong to those who are hearers but not doers of the word. Oh, may the Eternal Spirit work in us all to will and to do of his own good pleasure! There is nothing done by these Sundays, there is nothing done by these pulpits, there is nothing done by these pews, there is nothing done by these vast gatherings, unless our hearers are doers of the word. Practice is the harvest; the rest is but the ploughing and the sowing.

Observe that the command is put *negatively*: the text says, "not hearers only." Those who are hearers only are wasters of the word. What poor creatures hearers are, for they have long ears and no hands! Ye have heard of him who one day was discoursing eloquently of philosophy to a crowd, who greatly applauded him. He thought he had made many disciples, but suddenly the market-bell rang, and not a single person remained. Gain was to be made, and in their opinion no philosophy could be compared to personal profit. They were hearers till the market-bell rang, and then, as they had been hearers only, they quitted the hearing also. I fear it is so with our preachings: if the devil rings the bell for sin, for pleasure, for worldly amusement, or evil gain, our admirers quit us right speedily. The voice of the world drowns the voice of the word. Those who are only hearers, are hearers but for a time. Some of those now before me are hearers only. We cannot mark your houses by putting a cross upon your doors, and writing thereon, "Lord, have mercy upon us"; but if I did so, London would seem to be smitten with the plague. Oh that you would cease from this mocking of God, and ruining of yourselves! Remember, if any man will be lost, he will most surely be lost who heard the gospel and refused it. Write that word in great capital letters: if any soul will be lost emphatically, it is he who has been for years a hearer only, a hearer where thousands have believed unto eternal life. Over the cell of such a man write, "He knew his duty, but he did it not"; and that cell will be found to be built in the very centre of Gehenna; it is the innermost prison of hell. Wilful rejection of Christ ensures woeful rejection from Christ. Take heed, ye that deny him entrance now, lest he deny you entrance hereafter. Your hearts are hardening to an eternal impenitence necessitating eternal punishment.

"How they deserve the deepest hell
That slight the joys above!
What chains of vengeance must they feel
Who break the bonds of love!"

The text closes with this solemn word: "*deceiving your own selves.*" Whereupon says Bishop Brownrig, "To deceive is bad, to deceive yourselves is worse, to deceive yourselves about your souls is worst of all." Alas! there are many in that sad condition. A syllogism may be bad, and yet it may look like logic; and such are the hopes which men fashion out of a bare hearing of the word. It is very easy, when you get well accustomed to the gospel, *au fait* at it, as they say, to be able to twist it so as to make it seem to favour you, though it condemns you. He who wills to be deceived can feign an acquittal out of a sentence of death. Many think it is all right with them, when it is all wrong with them. They always hear the gospel; how can they be castaways? They sit under a thoroughly evangelical divine; how can they be reprobates? They know what is what; they will not consent to hear false doctrine; they have a discriminating faculty, and will not abide unorthodox teaching. I am very glad they will not; but they seem to make a god of this discernment. Alas! it is a mere idol. Hundreds believe that because their minister is unquestionably sound in the faith, therefore they are sound also. As they have the good sense to hear *him*, surely they are first-rate people, and the Lord will overlook their faults. Oh, sirs, be not such fools! Do not deceive yourselves in that way, for there is no truth in this comforting conclusion. The better that which you hear, the more guilty are you if you do not practise it; and the plainer and more straight the gospel which is taught you, the more inexcusable are you if you do not receive it. When the gospel comes to you with a heavy knock at the door of your heart, the more terrible your crime if you bolt and bar your door against it, or say, "When I have a more convenient season I will send for thee." God grant to each one of us that when we go home we may attend to the doing of the sermon. You know the old story; I am half ashamed to repeat it again, but it is so pat to the point. When Donald came out of kirk sooner than usual, Sandy said to him, "What, Donald, is the sermon all done?" "No," said Donald, "it is all said, but it is not begun to be done yet." Let my sermon be done in your chambers by prayer, and in your lives by holiness. Let it be done all through the week by our each one seeking to put away all filthiness. Let us cling to the holy Christ, desiring to live his life, and breathe his spirit. God grant it may be so with you all, for Jesus Christ's sake.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—James i.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—104, 652, 645.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE LOOKING-GLASS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 5TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."—James i. 23—25.

LAST Sabbath-day I tried to show the right way of hearing the Word of God. We spoke of how to behave before sermon, at sermon, and after sermon. May God grant that the word which I then spoke may continue in your minds, and bring forth good fruit! At this time I shall draw a distinction between the true and blessed hearer of the Word, and the person who misses the blessing because he hears to forget. You will forgive my coming back to this subject when I confess that I groan in my own heart with unutterable longings to be a channel of blessing to all who hear or read my discourses. To what purpose do I stand here so often, and pour out my soul before you, if you are not the better for it? I am an unhappy sower, if all the handfuls of seed which I scatter must needs fall upon unbroken soil, to be devoured of birds, and never take root. Blessed be God, it is not altogether so; we have reaped many harvests in this place; but still, our hearts ache for larger results! There remain among us still those who are impervious to the truth, in whom the divine Word has taken no lodging-place: will these never be saved? They still continue to listen, and to listen with kindly respect, but they are not yet doers of the Word. Our lament is that of Paul "They have not all obeyed the gospel"; they have heard it, and in a measure appreciated it, but they have not obeyed it; it has not come to them with power constraining them to yield to its commands. It will be a sad thing if, when I give in my account, it shall be with grief and not with joy; for this will be as unprofitable for you as it will be grievous for me. That I shall meet my hearers at the judgment day I know, and I know also that then an account will be demanded of me, much more searching than any through which my conscience can put me even when it is most awake. How will you stand in that account? It will be read in the seven-fold light of that great day for which all other days were made, and what will the record be? I earnestly desire to

present you all as a chaste virgin unto Christ, but I fear it will not be so. Concerning some of you I fear that I shall have run in vain, and laboured in vain. I am bowed with grief at such a prospect. O my hearers, do not kill me by destroying your own souls! Oh, that you may now turn to our Lord Jesus, and in him find acceptance with the Lord in that day! The Lord grant it for his infinite mercy's sake!

Two things are very obvious in the text: the first is the hearer of the Word who does not profit by it, and is represented as *looking into a glass;* and then, secondly, we see the man who does profit by the Word, for he is represented as *looking into the perfect law.* May the Holy Spirit help us to see these clearly!

I. First, then, here is LOOKING INTO A GLASS.

Looking into a glass is a trivial business. In all ages men, not to say women, have been fond of seeing themselves. In the earlier days they had no reflecting glasses as we now have, but they used mirrors made of brass and kindred metals, highly polished. These mirrors yielded a sufficiently clear image of the beholder. Albeit, the children of Israel came out of Egypt in a great hurry, yet we find that the women carried their looking-glasses with them into the wilderness. (See Ex. xxxviii. 8.) It was according to their womanly nature: whatever else they forgot they must have the indispensable looking-glass, for the purpose of their toilet. It is to their praise, however, that in the desert their devotion overcame their vanity; for when the brazen laver was to be made in which the priests should wash, it was made of the looking-glasses of the serving-women who were accustomed to meet at the door of the tabernacle. Still, the use of the mirror must be ranked among the trifles of life: I see that you are half-smiling at the playfulness which glitters around a glass. Is not this a hint at the light in which many regard the hearing of the gospel? They crowd to hear a preacher if he has some sort of name; not that they desire to get a blessing thereby, but merely that they may say that they have heard him, or that they may gratify their curiosity by seeing what he is like. Truly the burden of our lives is a pastime to some of you. Sirs, this reminds me of the fable of the frogs. When the boys stoned them, the poor creatures said, "It may be sport to you, but it is death to us." You may hear me this day with the idlest curiosity, and judge my message with the coldest criticism; but if you do not receive the blessings of the gospel, it strikes a chill at my heart. Your unspiritual hearing is sport to you, but it is death to me. A deadly shadow as of a hell-mist hovers over my spirit while I suppose it possible that I am, with all my earnestness, ministering to your condemnation. Can it be that I am laboriously doing nothing? Worse than that, are my instructions, persuasions, and entreaties to be so treated as to increase your responsibility, and bury you under a heavier load of sin? As God's servant, I tremble at so dreadful a prospect. We live if you live unto God; and if you do not turn to God we wish that we had never been born. It were better for us to plough the thankless sea, than to utter truth which will be a savour of death to you. O sirs, to hear the gospel will one day appear to be the most solemn of exercises! Indeed, it is not the trivial matter that many make of it; it is infinitely more than gazing into a mirror. How long will it be ere ye know this?

Upon my first head of looking into a glass let me say, that *to every hearer the true Word of God is as a mirror.* Certain preachers dream that it is their business to paint pretty pictures: but it is not so. We are not to design and sketch, but simply to give the reflection of truth. We are to hold up the mirror to nature in a moral and spiritual sense, and let men see themselves therein. We have not even to make the mirror, but only to hold it up. The thoughts of God, and not our own thoughts, are to be set before our hearers' minds; and these discover a man to himself. The Word of the Lord is a revealer of secrets: it shows a man his life, his thoughts, his heart, his inmost self.

A large proportion of hearers only look upon the surface of the gospel, and upon their minds the surface alone is operative. Yet, even that surface is sufficiently effectual to reflect the natural face which looks upon it, and this may be of lasting service if rightly followed up. Brethren, the chief blessing cannot come to us by surface-work; he that would be enriched by the gospel must dig for it, and must dig deep. He must sink shafts into its fathomless mines, that he may bring up "the much fine gold." Let not our thoughts glide over the surface of the Word like swift birds that touch the crests of the waves; but let us plunge into the depths of Scripture like pearl-fishers who seek for hid treasures.

The Scripture gives a truthful reflection of man's nature: it lets the man see himself, not as others see him, for others make mistakes, nor as he would see himself, for he is very apt to be partial to his own soul; but the Scripture makes him see himself as God sees him. Look at the scriptural portrait of a sinner. That art thou, O man! Look at the depraved heart, the rebellious will, the darkened understanding: that heart, will, and understanding are thine, O my brother! What a sight it is which meets the sinner's eye when he is hearing the faithful Word! "I thought," saith he, as he looks into the Word, "that I was much more comely than this. I had never dreamed of these freckles and spots. I was not aware that I suffered from such a twist of features, such an exaggeration of one and such a deficiency in another." The holy Book does not flatter human nature, neither does the true preacher attempt so base a work; but in plain and downright honesty of truth the witness is given, "They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." When conscience is aroused, and the man sees himself as the revelation of God declares him to be, he can hardly think that this can be the same self with which he was upon such excellent terms. If God blesses the sight, he is led to abhor himself, and to seek for cleansing and renewal; but if not, the man has at least seen himself, and has had the opportunity of knowing his true state.

The reflection of self in the Word is very like life. You have, perhaps, seen a dog so astonished at his image in the glass that he has barked fiercely at himself. A parrot will mistake its reflection for a rival. Well may the creature wonder, since every one of its movements is so accurately copied; it thinks itself to be mocked. Under a true preacher men are often so thoroughly unearthed and laid bare that even the details of their lives are reported. Not only is the portrait drawn to the life, but it is an actually living portrait which is given in the mirror

of the Word. There is little need to point with the finger, and say, "Thou art the man," for the hearer perceives of his own accord that he is spoken of. As the image in the glass moves, and alters its countenance, and changes its appearance, so doth the Word of the Lord set forth man in his many phases, and moods, and conditions. The Scripture of truth knows all about him, and it tells him what it knows. Many a time the hearer has said, "Somebody has told the preacher." Yes, somebody has told him: that which thou doest in thy bedchamber the Lord hath revealed unto his servant. The Holy Spirit guides our hands wittingly, so that we lay them upon the right heads. I have sometimes said to you that people frequently wish that the preacher knew their experience, in order that he could preach to it; but it is not necessary to tell God's sent servant anything about it, for he will speak to you with all the more power because he does *not* know. You may go in to hear the sermon, and be wearing a disguise, but even a blind prophet will find you out, and say, "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam, wherefore feignest thou thyself to be another woman? I have heavy tidings from the Lord for thee." The Chaldean soothsayers said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "Tell thy servants the dream, and we will shew the interpretation"; but Daniel knew the dream and the interpretation also, and that marked him out as being sent of God. When the preacher's description of the man's heart is true to the life, and yet no human mouth has whispered it into his ears, then the man cries, "This is the finger of God." A great part of the self-evidencing power of the gospel lies in the way in which it discovers to our minds that which aforetime lay within our bosoms, hidden even from ourselves.

The glass of the Word is not like our ordinary looking-glass, which merely shows us our external features; but, according to the Greek of our text, the man sees in it "the face of his birth"; that is, the face of his nature. He that reads and hears the Word may see not only his actions there, but his motives, his desires, his inward condition. As the butcher cuts down the carcase, and reveals all the inwards, which never could have been seen but for his knife, so is the Word of God "quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." The secrets of the man are opened up to himself, and he is astonished to see his inward depravity, his carnal tendencies, and his corrupt inclinations. As a man sees his outward self in the looking-glass, so may he see his inward self in the Word; but if this be all, to what purpose is it?

Secondly, *many a hearer does see himself in the mirror of the Word.* We are told so twice in the text: "He is like a man *beholding* his natural face in a glass, for he *beholdeth* himself." He really does see himself, for he cannot help doing so. He is not such a careless hearer as to be utterly blind to the revelation of God: he beholds, he beholds himself, he beholds the face of his birth. He is thoughtful during the discourse, he spies out the application of the truth to himself, and marks his own spots and blemishes.

Oftentimes he sees himself so plainly that he grows astonished at what he sees. He cries, like the woman of Samaria,—"Come, see a man that told

me all things that ever I did." Barbarous people, when they first of all see looking-glasses, are quite taken aback. "How can these things be?" is their first question. Now, have not you, dear hearers, who are unconverted, been often staggered at the home-thrusts of the Word? You have seen yourselves so unmistakably that you have been unable to escape from the truth, but have been filled with wonder at it. But what is the use of this, if it goes no further?

Such observers have been known to praise the excellence of the mirror, and speak well of its faithfulness. You may hear them say, "The man is a true servant of God, and preaches in all honesty and courage." So far so good. Alas! there are many preachers who will win no such praise. As I have seen glasses which have elongated my face or broadened it, so that it was by no means my true image, so have I known ministers whose description of human nature is flattering and false. But after all, if the face is not to be washed, to what purpose is it that the mirror faithfully shows the smuts and stains which are upon it? O my hearers, I desire to be always faithful to you, but how will my faithfulness benefit you if you are not faithful to yourselves? Why should I show you your blots if you do not seek to the Lord Jesus to have them removed?

Many of our hearers go somewhat further, for they are driven to make solemn resolves after looking at themselves. Yes, they will break off their sins by righteousness; they will repent; they will believe on the Lord Jesus; and yet their fine resolves are blown away like smoke, and come to nothing. The sight of their natural face leads to a natural resolve; but the strength of nature suffices not to carry the resolution into practice. O sirs, ye must be born again; and for lack of that new birth your goodness is as a morning cloud and as the early dew; both of these vanish soon, and so do your fine feelings and resolvings. What a multitude of dead resolves fall in this house of prayer! The blossoms upon our fruit-trees give great promise of a heavy crop of fruit, but, alas! the most of them do not knit, but drop from the tree and powder the ground as with snow; so the flowers of promise are upon our hearers, but they come not to real soul-fruit. O Spirit of God, make it otherwise with my congregation! Save them from their own inconstancy! Let them not resolve and re-resolve, and yet die in their sins!

But what follows? Observe, "He beholdeth himself, and goeth his way." *Many hearers go away from what they have seen in the Word.* There are two "ands" in the text, following quickly one after the other, and they have a force which I cannot very well convey to you. They show that the man looks at himself hurriedly, and as it were in passing, and so goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was, because his glance was hasty, casual, and soon over. He heard the Word, and there was an end of it; no echoes lingered in his soul. The sermon was over when it was over. Many a man, having seen himself in the glass of the Word, has no time for any further thought about himself. To-morrow morning he will be over head and ears in business; the shutters will be down from his shop-windows, but they will be put up to the windows of his soul. His office needs him, and therefore his prayer-closet cannot have him; his ledger falls like an

avalanche over his Bible. The man has no time to seek the true riches; passing trifles monopolize his mind. Sirs, ye call earthly things "business"; but the salvation or the damnation of your souls is such a trifling matter that any stray hour will suffice for it. Is it not so? Do you not propose to put off the Lord till your last gasp? The Lord deliver you from this madness! Oh, that you would no more allow your earthly business to crush your souls!

Others have no particular business to engross them, but having seen themselves in the glass of the Word with some degree of interest, they go their way to their amusements. Their principal difficulty is how to kill time, and spin the weary hours away. What will become of some of you who are going down to perdition with all your time to spare? You will not be able to say that you went your way to your farm, and to your merchandise, for you have neither farm nor merchandise, and do not know what to do with your time; and yet for all that you cannot spare an hour to think upon your souls and upon your God. Oh, that it were not so! May infinite mercy make men wiser than to go their way while their souls are going down to hell!

Alas! there are some who go their way to sin. It is not mere pleasure, or business, but it is an overt act of transgression to which they go. It is an awful thing to my mind that men go from hearing the Word of God to speaking the word of the devil; they go from God's house to the house of sin; they go straight away from the holy to the profane, from the pure to the foul. They go from the mercy-seat to the seat of the scorner. I do not wonder that no good comes of such hearing as this. When a man seeth his face in the glass, and then goeth his way to defile that face more and more, of what use is the glass to him? If you return to sin, to procrastinate, to live in wilful neglect of God and eternity, you would derive no benefit from such hearing, though all the apostles should in turn preach to you, or even their Master himself.

This going away is followed by forgetting all they have seen. This forgetfulness is indeed very mischievous. How different is this from that word of David, "I will never forget thy precepts"! The wicked forget God; but the favoured of the Lord "remember his commandments to do them." Forget the words of man, but be zealous to remember the Word of the Lord; for forgetfulness leads to inaction. Those who forget, forget to do. They follow not the Lord's command in the Book of Numbers: "Remember to do all my commandments." In Purchas's Pilgrim we read of certain Spaniards of the olden time who were often pinched with hunger, and yet immense shoals of fish passed along their shores. They saw the fish, but were too idle to take them. Are there not many hearers of that kind? The truth passes by them unappropriated, unused, unpractised, and all because they take no earnest heed to make it their own by personal obedience to it. They say, "I go, sir," but they forget to go. They see the pearl of great price, but forget to buy it. They are mere players with the Lord's message, and never come to honest dealing with it.

Forgetfulness of the Word leads to self-satisfaction. Looking in the glass the man felt a little startled that he was such an ugly fellow, but he went his way and mingled with the crowd, and forgot what manner

of man he was, and therefore he felt quite easy again. The sweep thinks he is as clean as his neighbours, for he has forgotten the soot upon his face. By the force of sheer ignorance a man can climb to a desperately false assurance of his own excellence. He can cry "Peace, peace," when there is no peace, till at length a blast of trumpets will not alarm him. What can be more fatal than this? One may as well not know, as only learn and straightway forget.

This forgetfulness leads to a growing carelessness. A man who has once looked in the glass, and afterwards has not washed, is very apt to go and look in the glass again, and continue in his filthiness. He who thinks his conscience has cried "wolf" in mere sport, will think the same till he takes no heed when it cries in earnest. When men get to play with the Word of God they are near to destruction. Beware of hearing the gospel as a pastime: it is the next stage to eternal ruin. When that which God designs to be to our salvation becomes a pastime to us, then all likelihood that it will save us is gone. He who sports with heaven and hell will soon lose all hope of the one, and be hurried downward to the other.

Yes, but let me remark that this forgetfulness of the Word leads to increased sin; for we do not hear the Word of God without some result coming of it. As I am responsible for preaching, so are you for hearing. O unconverted hearers, you to whom the gospel has come as a revealer of yourselves, but not as a renewer of your hearts, you have grown harder in sin, and you have sinned against more light and against more knowledge, and thus your sin grows blacker!

Thus have I sketched the hearer of the Word who is not a doer of it. I do not wish personally to apply this to any one here, but I beg that every person who does not know the Lord will make a personal application of it to his own conscience, and I pray God the Holy Ghost himself now to come and press these truths upon each conscience. O, my dear friends, will you not invite his sacred operations? You have seen your faces in the mirror of the Word; do you not desire to have them cleansed and beautified? You know your impurity; do you not wish to be cleansed by the blood of Jesus from all sin? Will you go your ways as if there were no law to accuse you, no gospel to invite you, no Christ to forgive you? Will you live and die as if there were no heaven, no hell, no eternity, no God? May the Lord deliver you from being triflers with the Word, and forgetters of it, lest at the end your religion should turn out to be vain, and you should find yourselves accursed by that which might have been a blessing to you!

II. May I have your further attention while I speak upon the true and blessed hearer? He does not look into the glass, but he is represented as LOOKING INTO THE LAW:—"Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."

The picture I have in my mind's eye at this moment is that of the cherubim upon the mercy-seat: these are models for us. Their standing is upon the golden mercy-seat, and our standing-place is the propitiation of our Lord: there is the resting-place of our feet, and, like the cherubs, we are joined thereto, and therefore continue therein. They stand with their eyes looking downward upon the mercy-seat, as if they desired

to look into the perfect law of God which was treasured within the ark: even so do we look through the atonement of our Lord Jesus, which is to us as pure gold like unto transparent glass, and we behold the law, as a perfect law of liberty, in the person of our Mediator. Like the cherubim, we are in happy company; and like them, we look towards each other, by mutual love. Our common standing is the atonement; our common study is the law in the person of Christ; and our common posture is that of angels with outstretched wings prepared to fly at the Master's bidding. Oh, that we might in this sense be as the cherubim, and like them abide in the secret-place of the Most High, where the light is the light of God, and the glory is the Divine Presence! We are not to look casually at the Word as though it were a mere looking-glass; but we are to gaze earnestly upon it as our law under the new covenant. As the apostles stooped down and looked into the sepulchre, so are we to search diligently into the blessed law of the Lord, and delight in it after the inner man.

Note well that *the law of God is worth looking into.* I understand by the "law" here not merely the law of ten commandments, but the law as it is condensed, fulfilled, and exhibited in Christ Jesus. The Gospel law, the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, that gospel which we are called upon to obey, is worthy of deep meditation; I mean that holy law which the Lord has promised to put into our inward parts and write upon our hearts: the law of faith and not of self-righteousness, even the command of grace which bids us believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and obey his commands. A law is always worth considering, for we may break the law unwittingly, and involve ourselves in penalties which we might have avoided. An unknown law is a pit-fall, into which a man may fall without knowing it. It is the duty of all loyal subjects to learn the law, that they may obey it.

Better still, it is a perfect law. All human laws are imperfect, but the law of the Lord is perfect. The law in the hand of Christ is perfect in itself, having no excess and no deficiency; and it is a law which makes those perfect who obey it. It is a law which is set forth in the person of the perfect Christ, and wrought in us by the perfect Spirit. It is a law which touches our whole nature, and works it unto perfect beauty. Who would not wish to look into a law which, like its Author, is love and purity itself?

It is called the "perfect law of liberty." Now, the law under the old covenant gendereth to bondage, but the law in the hand of Christ is liberty. We never walk in liberty till we walk in the Lord's commands. He that wears the yoke of Christ is the Lord's free man. Oh, brothers, I do trust our eyes will be turned to the "perfect law of liberty;" for freedom is a jewel, and none have it but those who are conformed to the mind and will of our God!

The true hearer looks into this perfect law of liberty with all his soul, heart, and understanding, till he knows it, and feels the force of it in his own character. He is the prince of hearers, who delights to know what God's will is, and finds his joy in acting out the same. He sees the law in its height of purity, breadth of comprehensiveness, and depth of spirituality, and the more he sees the more he admires. He cannot have too much of it, but meditates in it both day and night,

and hence he cries, "Oh, how I love thy law! it is my meditation all the day." His most frequent prayer is that he may be conformed unto that perfect law in all respects; and in proportion as his prayer is heard he enters into perfect rest. I pause and ask you whether you belong to the blessed company, who look into the crystal glass of the law. If you can answer that you are such, then please follow me for a minute or two. As I stand here I look into the mirror of the Word and see myself. But this is not enough for me: I will look till I see more. I continue looking into the mystic glass until, to my great surprise, I see another form appearing. Evidently some mysterious Personage is reflected in this mirror. How beautiful and majestic is the Stranger's visage! I look till the image of my countenance melts into the reflection of his countenance, and he alone is seen. I only appear in him. Is he not lovely? Indeed he is the Chief among ten thousand. Now I see the meaning of that word, "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

> "This is the thankful glass,
> That mends the looker's eyes; this is the well
> That washes what it shows."

Surely this is the mirror that Mercy, in "The Pilgrim's Progress," longed for. Does not Master Bunyan say of it, "Now the glass was one of a thousand. It would present a man one way, with his own features exactly; and turning it another way it would show one the very face and similitude of the Prince of Pilgrims himself. Yea, I have talked with them that can tell, and they have said that they have seen the very crown of thorns upon his head, by looking in that glass. They have therein also seen the holes in his hands, in his feet, and his side"?

A man looks into the law of liberty, and he sees all perfection in Christ: he looks and looks till, by a strange miracle of grace, his own image dissolves into the image of Jesus. Surely this is a thing worth looking into, and infinitely superior to any looking into a glass merely to see yourselves. We are compelled to say, "Come, see a Word which tells me all things that ever I did: did not this come from God?" Nay, more; we said this at first, but now we see Jesus, and we cry, "Come, see *a Man* that told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

He that looks into the perfect law of liberty will not only see Christ, but he will begin to see the Eternal Spirit of God bearing witness with that law of liberty, and operating by that witness upon his own soul. "Oh," saith he, "this is a blessed law indeed now, for I have it written upon the prepared tablets of my heart!" What a sight is that which lets us see the Holy Spirit working in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure, and making us conformable to the law of his own declaring!

Ay, and he that looks into that perfect law will, by-and-by, see God the Father; for the pure in heart shall see God. Those who love and live the law of God become like unto God, they are "imitators of God as dear children." They that are familiar with God's will, and love it,

and study it, gradually receive the likeness of God their Father till they are called the children of God. Thus the sacred Trinity are seen and known by those who do the will of the Father in heaven. Is not this a joy, to have our fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ? Oh, to prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God!

Dear friends, I cannot speak to you as I should like this morning; my theme masters me. I cannot make you see all that I see myself; but you must look into it for yourselves in the light of God. Look, and look again, till what you see in the Word is also to be seen in yourself. Transformation of character will follow upon meditation upon the truth of God, by the blessing of the Holy Ghost.

Note carefully that our text says, "*he continues*,"—"whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth." Our translators insert the word "therein"; but it is not in the Greek text. "And continueth"; that is, he continues to meditate in the law, and he continues to own his allegiance to it. The law of the Lord is always law to him. He also continues to practise it: he does not begin and then turn aside, but he continues to make advances in holy living and gracious conformity to the Lord's statutes, and he continues by a final perseverance to follow on. This is the hearer that shall win the blessing: not you who make a profession one day, and then disgrace it the next; not you who are all hot for Christ to-day and lukewarm to-morrow. The man who obtains the blessing of the Lord is by God's grace made to continue in it. I have heard of a famous King of Poland, who did brave deeds in his day, and confessed that he owed his excellent character to a secret habit which he had formed. He was the son of a noble father, and he carried with him a miniature portrait of this father, and often looked upon it. Whenever he went to battle he would look upon the picture of his father, and nerve himself to valour. When he sat in the council-chamber he would secretly look upon the image of his father, and behave himself right royally; for he said, "I will do nothing that can dishonour my father's name." Now, this is the grand thing for a Christian to do: to carry about with him the will of God in his heart, and then in every action to consult that will. We ought to ask:—What shall I do, as a child of God? What course shall I follow as a man of God, bought with the precious blood of Jesus Christ? It is thought by some that you cannot continue always in the will of God: they dream that you are to hear a sermon, and then be very pious: or go to a prayer-meeting, and then be very devout; but they think that this piety and devotion cannot remain with us all day. Brethren, we must continue in the law of the Lord, or we have no true religion. Living godliness is for the shop, and for the kitchen, and for the parlour, and for the street; it is a continuous struggle for holiness. Looking at the perfect will of God is for every day, and all the day. We are to believe for holiness; looking to the Lord to become like the Lord. I would fain have my Saviour's image painted on my eye-balls, so that I could not see except I saw everything through him. It is well to have Christ's portrait hung up in every chamber of your soul; I do not say of your house—that might lead to idolatry; but in every chamber of your mind and heart. I

once saw a room so covered with mirrors, that when I looked I saw myself some fifteen times, certainly to my taste fourteen times too often. But oh, I would have my whole being to be such, that whenever Jesus comes into it, he may see himself everywhere—above, below, to the right, to the left, and on all sides! Oh, to have him shining even into the innermost closet of our nature, so as to have no part dark! Oh, to become new editions of the life of Christ! We would not only look into the mirror, but we would be ourselves mirrors, reflecting the beauties of the holy Lord Jesus. But remember, this must not be occasional, but continual; for the true heart continues looking into the perfect law of liberty.

To conclude: you notice how it says, "*this man shall be blessed in his deed.*" Mark: "this man," "this man." These demonstrative pronouns act like fingers. A man has gone up to the temple to pray. What a fine gentleman he is! He wears a striking phylactery between his eyes, and he boasts a broad blue hem to his garment. He is a very superior person; you can see that at a glance. He stands in a prominent place in the temple, and he most pompously cries, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." Curious that the Book does not make much account of him. But yonder is a poor weeping creature who does not dare to come into a prominent position, nor even to lift up his eyes towards heaven. Every now and then he beats upon his breast as if very much depressed. At last he cries, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" See, the Saviour points out the publican and says, "*this* man,—*this* man went down to his house justified rather than the other." He lays his hand on him as one near to him, and says, "*this* man." In my text there is a person who has seen himself in the glass, and he has gone his way; but we need not mind about him, he is of no account. But here is a man who has been looking into the law, and has continued to look into it, and the Holy Spirit has selected him from all others, and marked him as "*this* man." *This* man is blessed. Perhaps he does not wear the best broad-cloth, perhaps he is arrayed in a fustian jacket; but he is selected and distinguished as "this man." Perhaps he has received no elaborate education: you will not see him at the Athenæum, or hear him discussing Evolution with the learned; yet he is "*this* man." "*This* man," says the text, "is blessed." Where is this man? Where is this woman? Judge whether you are the persons thus called and chosen; whether you are abiding in love to that law, which has won your heart.

"This man shall be blessed in his deed." "Oh," saith one, "I do not see the blessedness of true religion!" No, my friend, you are not likely to see it, because you do not *do* it. This man is blessed "*in his deed.*" "In keeping his commandments there is great reward." Much of the blessedness of godliness lies in the practice of godliness. Not in consideration of doctrine, but in obedience to precept the blessing lies. "This man shall be blessed in his deed." In the very act of serving his Lord and Master he shall be blessed; not *for* it but *in* it. The doing of the obedient deed is the evidence that God has blessed the doer from before the foundation of the world. His practical godliness is the evidence of his election; his actual holiness is the evidence of his redemption; his keeping close to the will of God is the evidence of his

adoption. Holiness is the witness that its possessor shall be blessed in the day when Christ shall glorify his people.

You who do not get a blessing by hearing the gospel may now see why it is so. You glance into a looking-glass, and that is all. Much good may it do you! After having seen your pretty selves you go your ways into the world to live as you lived before, and therefore you get no blessing. If you had gone to the divine law, that heavenly mirror of the will and mind of the Most High, it had been better for you. If, instead of making the Word a mirror to look at, you had made it a window to look through, and you had seen God in Christ, and perfect holiness in him, and had put your trust in Jesus, he would have given you a higher and better life, so that you would have become like to Jesus. Then you would have been blessed in your deed. Behold I set before you this morning, as they did of old upon Ebal and Gerizim, blessing and curse —the curse for those who peep into the looking-glass, but do no more; the blessing for those who attentively look into the perfect law of liberty, and continue so to do, till they are transformed into the image of the Lord! Which shall it be? May God the Eternal Spirit decide that question by leading you now solemnly, seriously, earnestly, to close in with Christ and his perfect law of liberty, and to him be glory for ever and ever! Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.—Matthew vii. 13—29.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—132, 641, 459.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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COMING JUDGMENT OF THE SECRETS OF MEN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 12TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel."—Romans ii. 16.

IT is impossible for any of us to tell what it cost the apostle Paul to write the first chapter of the epistle to the Romans. It is a shame even to speak of the things which are done of the vicious in secret places; but Paul felt that it was necessary to break through his shame, and to speak out concerning the hideous vices of the heathen. He has left on record an exposure of the sins of his day which crimsons the cheek of the modest when they read it, and makes both the ears of him that heareth it to tingle. Paul knew that this chapter would be read, not in his age alone, but in all ages, and that it would go into the households of the most pure and godly as long as the world should stand; and yet he deliberately wrote it, and wrote it under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. He knew that it must be written to put to shame the abominations of an age which was almost past shame. Monsters that revel in darkness must be dragged into the open, that they may be withered up by the light. After Paul has thus written in anguish he bethought himself of his chief comfort. While his pen was black with the words he had written in the first chapter, he was driven to write of his great delight. He clings to the gospel with a greater tenacity than ever. As in the verse before us he needed to mention the gospel, he did not speak of it as "the gospel," but as "*my gospel.*" "God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to *my gospel.*" He felt that he could not live in the midst of so depraved a people without holding the gospel with both hands, and grasping it as his very own. "*My gospel,*" saith he. Not that Paul was the author of it, not that Paul had an exclusive monopoly of its blessings, but that he had so received it from Christ himself, and regarded himself as so responsibly put in trust with it, that he could not disown it even for an instant. So fully had he taken it into himself that he could not do less than call it "my gospel." In another place he speaks of "our gospel"; thus using a possessive pronoun, to show how believers identify themselves with the truth which they preach. He had a gospel, a

definite form of truth, and he believed in it beyond all doubt; and therefore he spoke of it as "my gospel." Herein we hear the voice of faith, which seems to say, "Though others reject it, I am sure of it, and allow no shade of mistrust to darken my mind. To me it is glad tidings of great joy: I hail it as 'my gospel.' If I be called a fool for holding it, I am content to be a fool, and to find all my wisdom in my Lord."

> "Should all the forms that men devise
> Assault my faith with treacherous art,
> I'd call them vanity and lies,
> And bind the gospel to my heart."

Is not this word "my gospel" the voice of love? Does he not by this word embrace the gospel as the only love of his soul—for the sake of which he had suffered the loss of all things, and did count them but dung—for the sake of which he was willing to stand before Nero, and proclaim, even in Cæsar's palace, the message from heaven? Though each word should cost him a life, he was willing to die a thousand deaths for the holy cause. "My gospel," saith he, with a rapture of delight, as he presses to his bosom the sacred deposit of truth.

"My gospel." Does not this show his courage? As much as to say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." He says, "my gospel," as a soldier speaks of "my colours," or of "my king." He resolves to bear this banner to victory, and to serve this royal truth even to the death.

"My gospel." There is a touch of discrimination about the expression. Paul perceives that there are other gospels, and he makes short work with them, for he saith, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." The apostle was of a gentle spirit; he prayed heartily for the Jews who persecuted him, and yielded his life for the conversion of the Gentiles who maltreated him; but he had no tolerance for false gospellers. He exhibited great breadth of mind, and to save souls he became all things to all men; but when he contemplated any alteration or adulteration of the gospel of Christ, he thundered and lightened without measure. When he feared that something else might spring up among the philosophers, or among the Judaizers, that should hide a single beam of the glorious Sun of Righteousness, he used no measured language; but cried concerning the author of such a darkening influence, "Let him be accursed." Every heart that would see men blessed whispers an "Amen" to the apostolic malediction. No greater curse can come upon mankind than the obscuration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul saith of himself and his true brethren, "We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God"; and he cries to those who turned aside from the one and only gospel, "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you?" Of all new doctrines he speaks as of "another gospel, which is not another; but there be some that trouble you."

As for myself, looking at the matter afresh, amidst all the filthiness which I see in the world at this day, I lay hold upon the pure and blessed Word of God, and call it all the more earnestly, my gospel,—

mine in life and mine in death, mine against all comers, mine for ever, God helping me: with emphasis—"my gospel."

Now let us notice what it was that brought up this expression, "My gospel." What was Paul preaching about? Certainly not upon any of the gentle and tender themes, which we are told nowadays ought to occupy all our time; but he is speaking of the terrors of the law, and in that connection he speaks of "my gospel."

Let us come at once to our text. It will need no dividing, for it divides itself. First, let us consider that *on a certain day God shall judge mankind;* secondly, on that day *God will judge the secrets of men;* thirdly, when he judges the secrets of men, *it will be by Jesus Christ;* and fourthly, *this is according to the gospel.*

I. We begin with the solemn truth, that ON A CERTAIN DAY GOD WILL JUDGE MEN. A judgment is going on daily. God is continually holding court, and considering the doings of the sons of men. Every evil deed that they do is recorded in the register of doom, and each good action is remembered and laid up in store by God. That judgment is reflected in a measure in the consciences of men. Those who know the gospel, and those who know it not, alike, have a certain measure of light, by which they know right from wrong; their consciences all the while accusing or else excusing them. This session of the heavenly court continues from day to day, like that of our local magistrates; but this does not prevent but rather necessitates the holding of an ultimate great assize.

As each man passes into another world, there is an immediate judgment passed upon him; but this is only the foreshadowing of that which will take place in the end of the world.

There is a judgment also passing upon nations, for as nations will not exist as nations in another world, they have to be judged and punished in this present state. The thoughtful reader of history will not fail to observe, how sternly this justice has dealt with empire after empire, when they have become corrupt. Colossal dominions have withered to the ground, when sentenced by the King of kings. Go ye and ask to-day, "Where is the empire of Assyria? Where are the mighty cities of Babylon? Where are the glories of the Medes and Persians? What has become of the Macedonian power? Where are the Cæsars and their palaces?" These empires were forces established by cruelty, and used for oppression; they fostered luxury and licentiousness, and when they were no longer tolerable, the earth was purged from their polluting existence. Ah me! what horrors of war, bloodshed, and devastation, have come upon men as the result of their iniquities! The world is full of the monuments, both of the mercy and the justice of God: in fact the monuments of his justice, if rightly viewed, are proofs of his goodness; for it is mercy on the part of God to put an end to evil systems when, like a nightmare, they weigh heavily upon the bosom of mankind. The omnipotent Judge has not ceased from his sovereign rule over kingdoms, and our own country may yet have to feel his chastisements. We have often laughed among ourselves at the ridiculous idea of the New Zealander sitting on the broken arch of London Bridge amid the ruins of this metropolis. But is it quite so ridiculous as it looks? It is more than

possible it will be realized if our iniquities continue to abound. What is there about London that it should be more enduring than Rome? Why should the palaces of *our* monarchs be eternal if the palaces of Koyunjik have fallen? The almost boundless power of the Pharaohs has passed away, and Egypt has become the meanest of nations; why should not England come under like condemnation? What are we? What is there about our boastful race, whether on this side of the Atlantic or the other, that we should monopolize the favour of God? If we rebel, and sin against him, he will not hold us guiltless, but will deal out impartial justice to an ungrateful race.

Still, though such judgments proceed every day, yet there is to be a day, a period of time, in which, in a more distinct, formal, public, and final manner, God will judge the sons of men. We might have guessed this by the light of nature and of reason. Even heathen peoples have had a dim notion of a day of doom; but we are not left to guess it, we are solemnly assured of it in Holy Scripture. Accepting this Book as the revelation of God, we know beyond all doubt that a day is appointed in which the Lord will judge the secrets of men.

By judging is here meant all that concerns the proceedings of trial and award. God will judge the race of men; that is to say, first, there will be a session of majesty, and the appearing of a great white throne, surrounded with pomp of angels and glorified beings. Then a summons will be issued, bidding all men come to judgment, to give in their final account. The heralds will fly through the realms of death, and summon those who sleep in the dust: for the quick and the dead shall all appear before that judgment-seat. John says, "I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God"; and he adds, "The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them." Those that have been so long buried that their dust is mingled with the soil, and has undergone a thousand transmutations, shall nevertheless be made to put in a personal appearance before the judgment-seat of Christ. What an assize will that be! You and I and all the myriad myriads of our race shall be gathered before the throne of the Son of God. Then, when all are gathered, the indictment will be read, and each one will be examined concerning things done in the body, according to that he hath done. Then the books shall be opened, and everything recorded there shall be read before the face of heaven. Every sinner shall then hear the story of his life published to his everlasting shame. The good shall ask no concealment, and the evil shall find none. Angels and men shall then see the truth of things, and the saints shall judge the world. Then the great Judge himself shall give the decision: he shall pronounce sentence upon the wicked, and execute their punishment. No partiality shall there be seen; there shall be no private conferences to secure immunity for nobles, no hushing up of matters, that great men may escape contempt for their crimes. All men shall stand before the one great judgment-bar; evidence shall be given concerning them all, and a righteous sentence shall go forth from his mouth who knows not how to flatter the great.

This will be so, and it ought to be so: God should judge the world, because he is the universal ruler and sovereign. There has been a day for sinning, there ought to be a day for punishing; a long age of

rebellion has been endured, and there must be a time when justice shall assert her supremacy. We have seen an age in which reformation has been commanded, in which mercy has been presented, in which expostulation and entreaty have been used, and there ought at last to come a day in which God shall judge both the quick and the dead, and measure out to each the final result of life. It ought to be so for the sake of the righteous. They have been slandered; they have been despised and ridiculed; worse than that, they have been imprisoned and beaten, and put to death times without number: the best have had the worst of it, and there ought to be a judgment to set these things right. Besides, the festering iniquities of each age cry out to God that he should deal with them. Shall such sin go unpunished? To what end is there a moral government at all, and how is its continuance to be secured, if there be not rewards and punishments and a day of account? For the display of his holiness, for the overwhelming of his adversaries, for the rewarding of those who have faithfully served him, there must be and shall be a day in which God will judge the world.

Why doth it not come at once? And when will it come? The precise date we cannot tell. Man nor angel knoweth that day, and it is idle and profane to guess at it, since even the Son of man, as such, knoweth not the time. It is sufficient for us that the Judgment Day will surely come; sufficient also to believe that it is postponed on purpose to give breathing time for mercy, and space for repentance. Why should the ungodly want to know when that day will come? What is that day to you? To you it shall be darkness, and not light. It shall be the day of your consuming as stubble fully dry: therefore bless the Lord that he delayeth his coming, and reckon that his longsuffering is for your salvation.

Moreover, the Lord keeps the scaffold standing till he hath built up the fabric of his church. Not yet are the elect all called out from among the guilty sons of men; not yet are all the redeemed with blood redeemed with power and brought forth out of the corruption of the age into the holiness in which they walk with God. Therefore the Lord waiteth for a while. But do not deceive yourselves. The great day of his wrath cometh on apace, and your days of reprieve are numbered. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Ye shall die, perhaps, before the appearing of the Son of man; but ye shall see his judgment-seat for all that, for ye shall rise again as surely as he rose. When the apostle addressed the Grecian sages at Athens he said, "God now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." See ye not, O ye impenitent ones, that a risen Saviour is the sign of your doom. As God hath raised Jesus from the dead, so shall he raise your bodies, that in these you may come to judgment. Before the judgment-seat shall every man and woman in this house give an account of the things done in the body, whether they be good or whether they be evil. Thus saith the Lord.

II. Now I call your attention to the fact that "GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN." This will happen to all men, of every

nation, of every age, of every rank, and of every character. The Judge will, of course, judge their outward acts, but these may be said to have gone before them to judgment: their secret acts are specially mentioned, because these will make judgment to be the more searching.

By "the secrets of men," the Scripture means those secret crimes which hide themselves away by their own infamy, which are too vile to be spoken of, which cause a shudder to go through a nation if they be but dragged, as they ought to be, into the daylight. Secret offences shall be brought into judgment; the deeds of the night and of the closed room, the acts which require the finger to be laid upon the lip, and a conspiracy of silence to be sworn. Revolting and shameless sins which must never be mentioned lest the man who committed them should be excluded from his fellows as an outcast, abhorred even of other sinners—all these shall be revealed. All that you have done, any one of you, or are doing, if you are bearing the Christian name and yet practising secret sin, shall be laid bare before the universal gaze. If you sit here amongst the people of God, and yet where no eye sees you, if you are living in dishonesty, untruthfulness, or uncleanness, it shall all be known, and shame and confusion of face shall eternally cover you. Contempt shall be the inheritance to which you shall awake, when hypocrisy shall be no more possible. Be not deceived, God is not mocked; but he will bring the secrets of men into judgment.

Specially our text refers to the hidden motives of every action; for a man may do that which is right from a wrong motive, and so the deed may be evil in the sight of God, though it seem right in the sight of men. Oh, think what it will be to have your motives all brought to light, to have it proven that you were godly for the sake of gain, that you were generous out of ostentation, or zealous for love of praise, that you were careful in public to maintain a religious reputation, but that all the while everything was done for self, and self only! What a strong light will that be which God shall turn upon our lives, when the darkest chambers of human desire and motive shall be as manifest as public acts! What a revelation will that be which makes manifest all thoughts, and imaginings, and lustings, and desires! All angers, and envies, and prides, and rebellions of the heart—what a disclosure will these make!

All the sensual desires and imaginings of even the best-regulated, what a foulness will these appear! What a day will it be, when the secrets of men shall be set in the full blaze of noon!

God will also reveal secrets, that were secrets even to the sinners themselves, for there is sin in us which we have never seen, and iniquity in us which we have never yet discovered.

We have managed for our own comfort's sake to blind our eyes somewhat, and we take care to avert our gaze from things which it is inconvenient to see; but we shall be compelled to see all these evils in that day, when the Lord shall judge the secrets of men. I do not wonder that when a certain Rabbi read in the book of Ecclesiastes that God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil, he wept. It is enough to make the best man tremble. Were it not for thee, O Jesus, whose precious blood hath cleansed us from all sin, where should we be! Were it not for

thy righteousness, which shall cover those who believe in thee, who among us could endure the thought of that tremendous day? In thee, O Jesus, we are made righteous, and therefore we fear not the trial-hour; but were it not for thee our hearts would fail us for fear!

Now if you ask me why God should judge, especially the secrets of men—since this is not done in human courts, and cannot be, for secret things of this kind come not under cognizance of our short-sighted tribunals—I answer it is because there is really nothing secret from God. We make a difference between secret and public sins, but he doth not; for all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. All deeds are done in the immediate presence of God, who is personally present everywhere. He knows and sees all things as one upon the spot, and every secret sin is but conceived to be secret through the deluded fantasy of our ignorance. God sees more of a secret sin than a man can see of that which is done before his face. "Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord."

The secrets of men will be judged because often the greatest of moral acts are done in secret. The brightest deeds that God delights in are those that are done by his servants when they have shut the door and are alone with him; when they have no motive but to please him; when they studiously avoid publicity, lest they should be turned aside by the praise of men; when the right hand knoweth not what the left hand doeth, and the loving, generous heart deviseth liberal things, and doeth it behind the screen, so that it should never be discovered how the deed was done. It were a pity that such deeds should be left out at the great audit. Thus, too, secret vices are also of the very blackest kind, and to exempt them were to let the worst of sinners go unpunished. Shall it be that these polluted beings shall escape because they have purchased silence with their wealth? I say solemnly "God forbid." He does forbid it: what they have done in secret, shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops.

Besides, the secret things of men enter into the very essence of their actions. An action is, after all, good or bad very much according to its motive. It may seem good, but the motive may taint it; and so, if God did not judge the secret part of the action he would not judge righteously. He will weigh our actions, and detect the design which led to them, and the spirit which prompted them.

Is it not certainly true that the secret thing is the best evidence of the man's condition? Many a man will not do in public that which would bring him shame; not because he is not black-hearted enough for it, but because he is too much of a coward. That which a man does when he thinks that he is entirely by himself is the best revelation of the man. That which thou wilt not do because it would be told of thee if thou didst ill, is a poor index of thy real character. That which thou wilt do because thou wilt be praised for doing well, is an equally faint test of thy heart. Such virtue is mere self-seeking, or mean-spirited subservience to thy fellow-man; but that which thou doest out of respect to no authority but thine own conscience and thy God; that which thou doest unobserved, without regard to what man will say concerning it—that it is which reveals thee, and discovers thy real soul. Hence God

lays a special stress and emphasis here upon the fact that he will in that day judge "the secrets" of men by Jesus Christ.

Oh, friends, if it does not make you tremble to think of these things, it ought to do so. I feel the deep responsibility of preaching upon such matters, and I pray God of his infinite mercy to apply these truths to our hearts, that they may be forceful upon our lives. These truths ought to startle us, but I am afraid we hear them with small result; we have grown familiar with them, and they do not penetrate us as they should. We have to deal, brethren, with an omniscient God; with One who once knowing never forgets; with One to whom all things are always present; with One who will conceal nothing out of fear, or favour of any man's person; with One who will shortly bring the splendour of his omniscience and the impartiality of his justice to bear upon all human lives. God help us, where'er we rove and where'er we rest, to remember that each thought, word, and act of each moment lies in that fierce light which beats upon all things from the throne of God.

III. Another solemn revelation of our text lies in this fact, that "GOD WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN BY JESUS CHRIST." He that will sit upon the throne as the Vice-gerent of God, and as a Judge, acting for God, will be Jesus Christ. What a name for a Judge! The Saviour-Anointed—Jesus Christ: he is to be the Judge of all mankind. Our Redeemer will be the Umpire of our destiny.

This will be, I doubt not, first for the display of his glory. What a difference there will be then between the babe of Bethlehem's manger, hunted by Herod, carried down by night into Egypt for shelter, and the King of kings and Lord of lords, before whom every knee must bow! What a difference between the weary man and full of woes, and he that shall then be girt with glory, sitting on a throne encircled with a rainbow! From the derision of men to the throne of universal judgment, what an ascent! I am unable to convey to you my own heart's sense of the contrast between the "despised and rejected of men," and the universally-acknowledged Lord, before whom Cæsars and pontiffs shall bow into the dust. He who was judged at Pilate's bar, shall summon all to his bar. What a change from the shame and spitting, from the nails and the wounds, the mockery and the thirst, and the dying anguish, to the glory in which he shall come whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and out of whose mouth there goeth a two-edged sword! He shall judge the nations, even he whom the nations abhorred. He shall break them in pieces like a potter's vessel, even those who cast him out as unworthy to live among them. Oh, how we ought to bow before him now as he reveals himself in his tender sympathy, and in his generous humiliation! Let us kiss the Son lest he be angry; let us yield to his grace, that we may not be crushed by his wrath. Ye sinners, bow before those pierced feet, which else will tread you like clusters in the wine-press. Look ye up to him with weeping, and confess your forgetfulness of him, and put your trust in him; lest he look down on you in indignation. Oh, remember that he will one day say, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me." The holding of the judgment by the Lord Jesus will greatly enhance his glory. It will finally settle one controversy which is still upheld by certain erroneous spirits:

there will be no doubt about our Lord's deity in that day: there will be no question that this same Jesus who was crucified is both Lord and God. God himself shall judge, but he shall perform the judgment in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, truly man, but nevertheless most truly God. Being God he is divinely qualified to judge the world in righteousness, and the people with his truth.

If you ask again, Why is the Son of God chosen to be the final Judge? I could give as a further answer that he receives this high office not only as a reward for all his pains, and as a manifestation of his glory, but also because men have been under his mediatorial sway, and he is their Governor and King. At the present moment we are all under the sway of the Prince Immanuel, God with us: we have been placed by an act of divine clemency, not under the immediate government of an offended God, but under the reconciling rule of the Prince of Peace. "All power is given unto him in heaven and in earth." "The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." We are commanded to preach unto the people, and "to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the judge of quick and dead." (Acts x. 42.) Jesus is our Lord and King, and it is meet that he should conclude his mediatorial sovereignty by rewarding his subjects according to their deeds.

But I have somewhat to say unto you which ought to reach your hearts, even if other thoughts have not done so. I think that God hath chosen Christ, the man Christ Jesus, to judge the world that there may never be a cavil raised concerning that judgment. Men shall not be able to say—We were judged by a superior being who did not know our weaknesses and temptations, and therefore he judged us harshly, and without a generous consideration of our condition. No, God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, who was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He is our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, partaker of our humanity, and therefore understands and knows what is in men. He has shown himself to be skilful in all the surgery of mercy throughout the ages, and at last he will be found equally skilful in dissecting motives and revealing the thoughts and intents of the heart. Nobody shall ever be able to look back on that august tribunal and say that he who sat upon it was too stern, because he knew nothing of human weakness. It will be the loving Christ, whose tears, and bloody sweat, and gaping wounds, attest his brotherhood with mankind; and it will be clear to all intelligences that however dread his sentences, he could not be unmerciful. God shall judge us by Jesus Christ, that the judgment may be indisputable.

But hearken well—for I speak with a great weight upon my soul—this judgment by Christ Jesus, puts beyond possibility all hope of any after-interposition. If the Saviour condemns, and such a Saviour, who can plead for us? The owner of the vineyard was about to cut down the barren tree, when the dresser of the vineyard pleaded, "Let it alone this year also"; but what can come of that tree when the vinedresser himself shall say to the master, "It must fall; I myself must cut it down"! If your Saviour shall become your judge you will be judged indeed. If *he* shall say, "Depart, ye cursed," who can call you back?

If he that bled to save men at last comes to this conclusion, that there is no more to be done, but they must be driven from his presence, then farewell hope. To the guilty the judgment will indeed be a

"Great day of dread, decision, and despair."

An infinite horror shall seize upon their spirits as the words of the loving Christ shall freeze their very marrow, and fix them in the ice of eternal despair. There is, to my mind, a climax of solemnity in the fact that God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

Does not this also show how certain the sentence will be? for this Christ of God is too much in earnest to play with men. If he says, "Come, ye blessed," he will not fail to bring them to their inheritance. If he be driven to say, "Depart, ye cursed," he will see it done, and into the everlasting punishment they must go. Even when it cost him his life he did not draw back from doing the will of his Father, nor will he shrink in that day when he shall pronounce the sentence of doom. Oh, how evil must sin be since it constrains the tender Saviour to pronounce sentence of eternal woe! I am sure that many of us have been driven of late to an increased hatred of sin; our souls have recoiled within us because of the wickedness among which we dwell; it has made us feel as if we would fain borrow the Almighty's thunderbolts with which to smite iniquity. Such haste on our part may not be seemly, since it implies a complaint against divine long-suffering; but Christ's dealing with evil will be calm and dispassionate, and all the more crushing. Jesus, with his pierced hand, that bears the attestation of his supreme love to men, shall wave the impenitent away; and those lips which bade the weary rest in him shall solemnly say to the wicked, "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." To be trampled beneath the foot which was nailed to the cross will be to be crushed indeed: yet so it is, God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.

It seems to me as if God in this intended to give a display of the unity of all his perfections. In this same man, Christ Jesus, the Son of God, you behold justice and love, mercy and righteousness, combined in equal measure. He turns to the right, and says, "Come, ye blessed," with infinite suavity; and with the same lip, as he glances to the left, he says, "Depart, ye cursed." Men will then see at one glance how love and righteousness are one, and how they meet in equal splendour in the person of the Well-beloved, whom God has therefore chosen to be Judge of quick and dead.

IV. I have done when you have borne with me a minute or two upon my next point, which is this: and ALL THIS IS ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL. That is to say, there is nothing in the gospel contrary to this solemn teaching. Men gather to us, to hear us preach of infinite mercy, and tell of the love that blots out sin; and our task is joyful when we are called to deliver such a message; but oh, sirs, remember that nothing in our message makes light of sin. The gospel offers you no opportunity of going on in sin, and escaping without punishment. Its own cry is, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Jesus has not come into the world to make sin less terrible. Nothing in the gospel excuses sin; nothing in it affords toleration for lust or anger,

or dishonesty, or falsehood. The gospel is as truly a two-edged sword against sin, as ever the law can be. There is grace for the man who quits his sin, but there is tribulation and wrath upon every man that doeth evil. "If ye turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready." The gospel is all tenderness to the repenting, but all terror to the obstinate offender. It has pardon for the very chief of sinners, and mercy for the vilest of the vile, if they will forsake their sins; but it is according to our gospel that he that goeth on in his iniquity, shall be cast into hell, and he that believeth not shall be damned. With deep love to the souls of men, I bear witness to the truth that he who turns not with repentance and faith to Christ, shall go away into punishment as everlasting as the life of the righteous. This is according to our gospel: indeed, we had not needed such a gospel, if there had not been such a judgment. The background of the cross is the judgment-seat of Christ. We had not needed so great an atonement, so vast a sacrifice, if there had not been an exceeding sinfulness in sin, an exceeding justice in the judgment, and an exceeding terror in the sure rewards of transgression.

"According to my gospel," saith Paul; and he meant that the judgment is an essential part of the gospel creed. If I had to sum up the gospel I should have to tell you certain facts: Jesus, the Son of God, became man; he was born of the virgin Mary; lived a perfect life; was falsely accused of men, was crucified, dead, and buried; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God; from whence he shall also come to judge the quick and the dead. This is one of the elementary truths of our gospel; we believe in the resurrection of the dead, the final judgment, and the life everlasting.

The judgment is according to our gospel, and in times of righteous indignation its terrible significance seemeth a very gospel to the pure in heart. I mean this. I have read this and that concerning oppression, slavery, the treading down of the poor, and the shedding of blood, and I have rejoiced that there is a righteous Judge. I have read of secret wickednesses among the rich men of this city, and I have said within myself, "Thank God, there will be a judgment-day." Thousands of men have been hanged for much less crimes than those which now disgrace gentlemen whose names are on the lips of rank and beauty. Ah me, how heavy is our heart as we think of it! It has come like a gospel to us that the Lord will be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess. i. 8.) The secret wickedness of London cannot go on for ever. Even they that love men best, and most desire salvation for them, cannot but cry to God, "How long! How long! Great God, wilt thou for ever endure this?" God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world, and we sigh and cry until it shall end the reign of wickedness, and give rest to the oppressed. Brethren, we must preach the coming of the Lord, and preach it somewhat more than we have done; because it is the driving power of the gospel. Too many have kept back these truths, and thus the bone has been taken out of the arm of the gospel. Its point has been broken; its edge has been blunted. The doctrine of judgment to come is the power by which men are to be

aroused. There is another life; the Lord will come a second time; judgment will arrive; the wrath of God will be revealed. Where this is not preached, I am bold to say the gospel is not preached. It is absolutely necessary to the preaching of the gospel of Christ that men be warned as to what will happen if they continue in their sins. Ho, ho, sir surgeon, you are too delicate to tell the man that he is ill! You hope to heal the sick without their knowing it. You therefore flatter them; and what happens? They laugh at you; they dance upon their own graves. At last they die! Your delicacy is cruelty; your flatteries are poisons; you are a murderer. Shall we keep men in a fool's paradise? Shall we lull them into soft slumbers from which they will awake in hell? Are we to become helpers of their damnation by our smooth speeches? In the name of God we will not. It becomes every true minister of Christ to cry aloud and spare not, for God hath set a day in which he will "judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." As surely as Paul's gospel was true the judgment will come. Wherefore flee to Jesus this day, O sinners. O ye saints, come hide yourselves again beneath the crimson canopy of the atoning sacrifice, that you may be now ready to welcome your descending Lord and escort him to his judgment-seat. O my hearers, may God bless you, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Revelation xx.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—863, 364, 345.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

IMMEASURABLE LOVE.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JULY 26TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON THE EVENING OF JUNE 7TH, 1885.

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John iii. 16.

I WAS very greatly surprised the other day, in looking over the list of texts from which I have preached, to find that I have no record of ever having spoken from this verse. This is all the more singular, because I can truly say that it might be put in the forefront of all my volumes of discourses as the sole topic of my life's ministry. It has been my one and only business to set forth the love of God to men in Christ Jesus. I heard lately of an aged minister of whom it was said, "Whatever his text, he never failed to set forth God as love, and Christ as the atonement for sin." I wish that much the same may be said of me. My heart's desire has been to sound forth as with a trumpet the good news that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

We are about to meet around the communion table, and I cannot preach from this text anything but a simple gospel sermon. Can you desire a better preparation for communion? We have fellowship with God and with one another upon the basis of the infinite love which is displayed in Jesus Christ our Lord. The gospel is the fair white linen cloth which covers the table on which the Communion Feast is set. The higher truths, those truths which belong to a more enlightened experience, those richer truths which tell of the fellowship of the higher life—all these are helpful to holy fellowship; but I am sure not more so than those elementary and foundation truths which were the means of our first entrance into the kingdom of God. Babes in Christ and men in Christ here feed upon one common food. Come, ye aged saints, be children again; and you that have long known your Lord, take up your first spelling-book, and go over your A B C again, by learning that God so loved the world, that he gave his Son to die, that man

might live through him. I do not call you to an elementary lesson because you have forgotten your letters, but because it is a good thing to refresh the memory, and a blessed thing to feel young again. What the old folks used to call the Christ-cross Row contained nothing but the letters; and yet all the books in the language are made out of that line: therefore do I call you back to the cross, and to him who bled thereon. It is a good thing for us all to return at times to our starting-place, and make sure that we are in the way everlasting. The love of our espousals is most likely to continue if we again and again begin where God began with us, and where we first began with God. It is wise to come to him afresh, as we came in that first day when, helpless, needy, heavy-laden, we stood weeping at the cross, and left our burden at the pierced feet. There we learned to look, and live, and love; and there would we repeat the lesson till we rehearse it perfectly in glory.

To-night, we have to talk about the love of God: "God so loved the world." That love of God is a very wonderful thing, especially when we see it set upon a lost, ruined, guilty world. What was there in the world that God should love it? There was nothing lovable in it. No fragrant flower grew in that arid desert. Enmity to him, hatred to his truth, disregard of his law, rebellion against his commandments; those were the thorns and briars which covered the waste land; but no desirable thing blossomed there. Yet, "God loved the world," says the text; "so" loved it, that even the writer of the book of John could not tell us how much; but so greatly, so divinely, did he love it that he gave his Son, his only Son, to redeem the world from perishing, and to gather out of it a people to his praise.

Whence came that love? Not from anything outside of God himself. God's love springs from himself. He loves because it is his nature to do so. "God is love." As I have said already, nothing upon the face of the earth could have merited his love, though there was much to merit his displeasure. This stream of love flows from its own secret source in the eternal Deity, and it owes nothing to any earth-born rain or rivulet; it springs from beneath the everlasting throne, and fills itself full from the springs of the infinite. God loved because he would love. When we enquire why the Lord loved this man or that, we have to come back to our Saviour's answer to the question, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." God has such love in his nature that he must needs let it flow forth to a world perishing by its own wilful sin; and when it flowed forth it was so deep, so wide, so strong, that even inspiration could not compute its measure, and therefore the Holy Spirit gave us that great little word SO, and left us to attempt the measurement, according as we perceive more and more of love divine.

Now, there happened to be an occasion upon which the great God could display his immeasurable love. The world had sadly gone astray; the world had lost itself; the world was tried and condemned; the world was given over to perish, because of its offences; and there was need for help. The fall of Adam and the destruction of mankind made ample room and verge enough for love almighty. Amid the ruins of humanity there was space for showing how much Jehovah loved the sons of men; for the compass of his love was no less than the world, the

object of it no less than to deliver men from going down to the pit, and the result of it no less than the finding of a ransom for them. The far-reaching purpose of that love was both negative and positive; that, believing in Jesus, men might not perish, but have eternal life. The desperate disease of man gave occasion for the introduction of that divine remedy which God alone could have devised and supplied. By the plan of mercy, and the great gift which was needed for carrying it out, the Lord found means to display his boundless love to guilty men. Had there been no fall, and no perishing, God might have shown his love to us as he does to the pure and perfect spirits that surround his throne; but he never could have commended his love to us to such an extent as he now does. In the gift of his only-begotten Son, God commended his love to us, in that while we were yet sinners, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. The black background of sin makes the bright line of love shine out the more clearly. When the lightning writes the name of the Lord with flaming finger across the black brow of the tempest, we are compelled to see it; so when love inscribes the cross upon the jet tablet of our sin, even blind eyes must see that "herein is love."

I might handle my text in a thousand different ways to-night; but for simplicity's sake, and to keep to the one point of setting forth the love of God, I want to make you see how great that love is by five different particulars.

I. The first is the GIFT: "God so loved the world, that *he gave his only begotten Son.*" Men who love much will give much, and you may usually measure the truth of love by its self-denials and sacrifices. That love which spares nothing, but spends itself to help and bless its object, is love indeed, and not the mere name of it. Little love forgets to bring water for the feet, but great love breaks its box of alabaster and lavishes its precious ointment.

Consider, then, *what this gift was* that God gave. I should have to labour for expression if I were to attempt to set forth to the full this priceless boon; and I will not court a failure by attempting the impossible. I will only invite you to think of the sacred Person whom the Great Father gave in order that he might prove his love to men. It was his only-begotten Son—his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. None of us had ever such a son to give. Ours are the sons of men; his was the Son of God. The Father gave his other self, one with himself. When the great God gave his Son he gave God himself, for Jesus is not in his eternal nature less than God. When God gave God for us he gave himself. What more could he give? God gave his all: he gave himself. Who can measure this love?

Judge, ye fathers, how ye love your sons: could ye give them to die for your enemy? Judge, ye that have an only son, how your hearts are entwined about your first-born, your only-begotten. There was no higher proof of Abraham's love to God than when he did not withhold from God his son, his only son, his Isaac whom he loved; and there can certainly be no greater display of love than for the Eternal Father to give his only-begotten Son to die for us. No living thing will readily lose its offspring; man has peculiar grief when his son is taken; has not God yet more? A story has often been told of the fondness

of parents for their children; how in a famine in the East a father and mother were reduced to absolute starvation, and the only possibility of preserving the life of the family was to sell one of the children into slavery. So they considered it. The pinch of hunger became unbearable, and their children pleading for bread tugged so painfully at their heart-strings, that they must entertain the idea of selling one to save the lives of the rest. They had four sons. Who of these should be sold? It must not be the first: how could they spare their first-born? The second was so strangely like his father that he seemed a reproduction of him, and the mother said that she would never part with *him*. The third was so singularly like the mother that the father said he would sooner die than that this dear boy should go into bondage; and as for the fourth, he was their Benjamin, their last, their darling, and they could not part with *him*. They concluded that it were better for them all to die together than willingly to part with any one of their children. Do you not sympathize with them? I see you do. Yet God so loved us that, to put it very strongly, he seemed to love us better than his only Son, and did not spare him that he might spare us. He permitted his Son to perish from among men "that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life."

If you desire to see the love of God in this great procedure you must consider *how he gave his Son*. He did not give his Son, as you might do, to some profession in the pursuit of which you might still enjoy his company; but he gave his Son to exile among men. He sent him down to yonder manger, united with a perfect manhood, which at the first was in an infant's form. There he slept, where horned oxen fed! The Lord God sent the heir of all things to toil in a carpenter's shop: to drive the nail, and push the plane, and use the saw. He sent him down amongst scribes and Pharisees, whose cunning eyes watched him, and whose cruel tongues scourged him with base slanders. He sent him down to hunger, and thirst, amid poverty so dire that he had not where to lay his head. He sent him down to the scourging and the crowning with thorns, to the giving of his back to the smiters and his cheeks to those that plucked off the hair. At length he gave him up to death—a felon's death, the death of the crucified. Behold that cross and see the anguish of him that dies upon it, and mark how the Father has so given him, that he hides his face from him, and seems as if he would not own him! "Lama sabachthani" tells us how fully God gave his Son to ransom the souls of the sinful. He gave him to be made a curse for us; gave him that he might die "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God."

Dear sirs, I can understand your giving up your children to go to India on her Majesty's service, or to go out to the Cameroons or the Congo upon the errands of our Lord Jesus. I can well comprehend your yielding them up even with the fear of a pestilential climate before you, for if they die they will die honourably in a glorious cause; but could you think of parting with them to die a felon's death, upon a gibbet, execrated by those whom they sought to bless, stripped naked in body and deserted in mind? Would not that be too much? Would you not cry, "I cannot part with my son for such wretches as these. Why should he be put to a cruel death for such abominable beings, who

even wash their hands in the blood of their best friend"? Remember that our Lord Jesus died what his countrymen considered to be an accursed death. To the Romans it was the death of a condemned slave, a death which had all the elements of pain, disgrace, and scorn mingled in it to the uttermost. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Oh, wondrous stretch of love, that Jesus Christ should die!

Yet, I cannot leave this point till I have you notice *when God gave his Son,* for there is love in the time. "God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son." But when did he do that? In his eternal purpose he did this from before the foundation of the world. The words here used, "He gave his Only Begotten Son," cannot relate exclusively to the death of Christ, for Christ was not dead at the time of the utterance of this third chapter of John. Our Lord had just been speaking with Nicodemus, and that conversation took place at the beginning of his ministry. The fact is that Jesus was always the gift of God. The promise of Jesus was made in the garden of Eden almost as soon as Adam fell. On the spot where our ruin was accomplished, a Deliverer was bestowed whose heel should be bruised, but who should break the serpent's head beneath his foot.

Throughout the ages the great Father stood to his gift. He looked upon his Only Begotten as man's hope, the inheritance of the chosen seed, who in him would possess all things. Every sacrifice was God's renewal of his gift of grace, a reassurance that he had bestowed the gift, and would never draw back therefrom. The whole system of types under the law betokened that in the fulness of time the Lord would in very deed give up his Son, to be born of a woman, to bear the iniquities of his people, and to die the death in their behalf. I greatly admire this pertinacity of love; for many a man in a moment of generous excitement can perform a supreme act of benevolence, and yet could not bear to look at it calmly, and consider it from year to year; the slow fire of anticipation would have been unbearable. If the Lord should take away yonder dear boy from his mother, she would bear the blow with some measure of patience, heavy as it would be to her tender heart; but suppose that she were credibly informed that on such a day her boy must die, and thus had from year to year to look upon him as one dead, would it not cast a cloud over every hour of her future life? Suppose also that she knew that he would be hanged upon a tree to die, as one condemned; would it not embitter her existence? If she could withdraw from such a trial, would she not? Assuredly she would. Yet the Lord God spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, doing it in his heart from age to age. Herein is love: love which many waters could not quench: love eternal, inconceivable, infinite!

Now, as this gift refers not only to our Lord's death, but to the ages before it, so it includes also all the ages afterwards. God "so loved the world that he gave"—and still gives—"his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life." The Lord is giving Christ away to-night. Oh, that thousands of you may gladly accept the gift unspeakable! Will anyone refuse? This good gift, this perfect gift,—can you decline it? Oh, that you may

have faith to lay hold on Jesus, for thus he will be yours. He is God's free gift to all free receivers; a full Christ for empty sinners. If you can but hold out your empty willing hand, the Lord will give Christ to you at this moment. Nothing is freer than a gift. Nothing is more worth having than a gift which comes fresh from the hand of God, as full of effectual power as ever it was. The fountain is eternal, but the stream from it is as fresh as when first the fountain was opened. There is no exhausting this gift.

"Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

See, then, what is the love of God, that he gave his Son from of old, and has never revoked the gift. He stands to his gift, and continues still to give his dear Son to all who are willing to accept him. Out of the riches of his grace he has given, is giving, and will give the Lord Jesus Christ, and all the priceless gifts which are contained in him, to all needy sinners who will simply trust him.

I call upon you from this first point to admire the love of God, because of the transcendent greatness of his gift to the world, even the gift of his only begotten Son.

II. Now notice secondly, and, I think I may say, with equal admiration, the love of God in THE PLAN OF SALVATION. He has put it thus: "that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The way of salvation is extremely simple to understand, and exceedingly easy to practise, when once the heart is made willing and obedient. The method of the covenant of grace differs as much from that of the covenant of works as light from darkness. It is not said that God has given his Son to all who will keep his law, for that we could not do, and therefore the gift would have been available to none of us. Nor is it said that he has given his Son to all that experience terrible despair and bitter remorse, for that is not felt by many who nevertheless are the Lord's own people. But the great God has given his own Son, that "whosoever believeth in him" should not perish. Faith, however slender, saves the soul. Trust in Christ is the certain way of eternal happiness.

Now, what is it to believe in Jesus? It is just this: it is to trust yourself with him. If your hearts are ready, though you have never believed in Jesus before, I trust you will believe in him now. O Holy Spirit graciously make it so.

What is it to believe in Jesus?

It is, first, to give your *firm and cordial assent* to the truth, that God did send his Son, born of a woman, to stand in the room and stead of guilty men, and that God did cause to meet on him the iniquities of us all, so that he bore the punishment due to our transgressions, being made a curse for us. We must heartily believe the Scripture which saith,—"the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." I ask for your assent to the grand doctrine of substitution, which is the marrow of the gospel. Oh, may God the Holy Spirit lead you to give a cordial assent to it at once; for wonderful as it is, it is a fact that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing

their trespasses unto them. Oh that you may rejoice that this is true, and be thankful that such a blessed fact is revealed by God himself. Believe that the substitution of the Son of God is certain; cavil not at the plan, nor question its validity, or efficacy, as many do. Alas! they kick at God's great sacrifice, and count it a sorry invention. As for me, since God has ordained to save man by a substitutionary sacrifice, I joyfully agree to his method, and see no reason to do anything else but admire it and adore the Author of it. I joy and rejoice that such a plan should have been thought of, whereby the justice of God is vindicated, and his mercy is set free to do all that he desires. Sin is punished in the person of the Christ, yet mercy is extended to the guilty. In Christ mercy is sustained by justice, and justice satisfied by an act of mercy. The worldly wise say hard things about this device of infinite wisdom; but as for me, I love the very name of the cross, and count it to be the centre of wisdom, the focus of love, the heart of righteousness. This is a main point of faith—to give a hearty assent to the giving of Jesus to suffer in our place and stead, to agree with all our soul and mind to this way of salvation.

The second thing is that you do *accept this for yourself.* In Adam's sin, you did not sin personally, for you were not then in existence; yet you fell; neither can you now complain thereof, for you have willingly endorsed and adopted Adam's sin by committing personal transgressions. You have laid your hand, as it were, upon Adam's sin, and made it your own, by committing personal and actual sin. Thus you perished by the sin of another, which you adopted and endorsed; and in like manner must you be saved by the righteousness of another, which you are to accept and appropriate. Jesus has offered an atonement, and that atonement becomes yours when you accept it by putting your trust in him. I want you now to say,

> "My faith doth lay her hand
> On that dear head of thine,
> While, like a penitent, I stand,
> And here confess my sin."

Surely this is no very difficult matter. To say that Christ who hung upon the cross shall be my Christ, my surety, needs neither stretch of intellect, nor splendour of character; and yet it is the act which brings salvation to the soul.

One thing more is needful; and that is *personal trust.* First comes assent to the truth, then acceptance of that truth for yourself, and then a simple trusting of yourself wholly to Christ, as a substitute. The essence of faith is trust, reliance, dependence. Fling away every other confidence of every sort, save confidence in Jesus. Do not allow a ghost of a shade of a shadow of a confidence in anything that you can do, or in anything that you can be; but look alone to him whom God has set forth to be the propitiation for sin. This I do at this very moment; will you not do the same? Oh, may the sweet Spirit of God lead you now to trust in Jesus!

See, then, the love of God in putting it in so plain, so easy a way. Oh, thou broken, crushed and despairing sinner, thou canst not work, but canst thou not believe that which is true? Thou canst not sigh; thou canst not cry; thou canst not melt thy stony heart; but canst

thou not believe that Jesus died for thee, and that he can change that heart of thine and make thee a new creature? If thou canst believe this, then trust in Jesus to do so, and thou art saved; for he that believes in him is justified. "He that believeth in him *hath* everlasting life." He is a saved man. His sins are forgiven him. Let him go his way in peace, and sin no more.

I admire, first, the love of God in the great gift, and then in the great plan by which that gift becomes available to guilty men.

III. Thirdly, the love of God shines forth with transcendent brightness in a third point, namely, in THE PERSONS FOR WHOM THIS PLAN IS AVAILABLE, and for whom this gift is given. They are described in these words—"Whosoever believeth in him." There is in the text a word which has no limit—"God so loved the world"; but then comes in the descriptive limit, which I beg you to notice with care: "He gave his Only Begotten Son *that whosoever believeth in him* might not perish." God did not so love the world that any man who does not believe in Christ shall be saved; neither did God so give his Son that any man shall be saved who refuses to believe in him. See how it is put—"God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish." Here is the compass of the love: while every unbeliever is excluded, every believer is included. "Whosoever believeth in him." Suppose there be a man who has been guilty of all the lusts of the flesh to an infamous degree, suppose that he is so detestable that he is only fit to be treated like a moral leper, and shut up in a separate house for fear he should contaminate those who hear or see him; yet if that man shall believe in Jesus Christ, he shall at once be made clean from his defilement, and shall not perish because of his sin. And suppose there be another man who, in the pursuit of his selfish motives, has ground down the poor, has robbed his fellow-traders, and has even gone so far as to commit actual crime of which the law has taken cognisance, yet if he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ he shall be led to make restitution, and his sins shall be forgiven him. I once heard of a preacher addressing a company of men in chains, condemned to die for murder and other crimes. They were such a drove of beasts to all outward appearances that it seemed hopeless to preach to them; yet were I set to be chaplain to such a wretched company I should not hesitate to tell them that "God so loved the world, that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that *whosoever* believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." O man, if thou wilt believe in Jesus as the Christ, however horrible thy past sins have been they shall be blotted out; thou shalt be saved from the power of thine evil habits; and thou shalt begin again like a child newborn, with a new and true life, which God shall give thee. "Whosoever believeth in him,"—that takes you in, my aged friend, now lingering within a few tottering steps of the grave. O grey-headed sinner, if you believe in him, you shall not perish. The text also includes you, dear boy, who have scarcely entered your teens as yet: if you believe in him, you shall not perish. That takes you in, fair maiden, and gives you hope and joy while yet young. That comprehends all of us, provided we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Neither can all the devils in hell find out any reason why the man that believes in Christ shall be lost,

for it is written, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Do they say, "Lord, he has been so long in coming"? The Lord replies,—"Has he come? Then I will not cast him out for all his delays." But, Lord, he went back after making a profession. "Has he at length come? Then I will not cast him out for all his backslidings." But, Lord, he was a foul-mouthed blasphemer. "Has he come to me? Then I will not cast him out for all his blasphemies." But, says one, "I take exception to the salvation of this wicked wretch. He has behaved so abominably that in all justice he ought to be sent to hell." Just so. But if he repents of his sin and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, whoever he may be, he shall not be sent there. He shall be changed in character, so that he shall never perish, but have eternal life.

Now, observe, that this "whosoever" makes a grand sweep; for it encircles all degrees of faith. "Whosoever believeth in him." It may be that he has no full assurance; it may be that he has no assurance at all; but if he has faith, true and childlike, by it he shall be saved. Though his faith be so little that I must needs put on my spectacles to see it, yet Christ will see it and reward it. His faith is such a tiny grain of mustard seed that I look and look again but hardly discern it, and yet it brings him eternal life, and it is itself a living thing. The Lord can see within that mustard seed a tree among whose branches the birds of the air shall make their nests.

"My faith is feeble, I confess,
I faintly trust thy word;
But wilt thou pity me the less?
Be that far from thee, Lord!"

O Lord Jesus, if I cannot take thee up in my arms as Simeon did, I will at least touch thy garment's hem as the poor diseased woman did to whom thy healing virtue flowed. It is written, "God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." That means me. I cannot preach at length to you to-night; but I would preach with strength. Oh that this truth may soak into your souls. Oh you that feel yourselves guilty; and you that feel guilty because you do not feel guilty; you that are broken in heart because your heart will not break; you that feel that you cannot feel; it is to you that I would preach salvation in Christ by faith. You groan because you cannot groan; but whoever you may be, you are still within the range of this mighty word, that "whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Thus have I commended God's love to you in those three points—the divine gift, the divine method of saving, and the divine choice of the persons to whom salvation comes.

IV. Now fourthly, another beam of divine love is to be seen in the negative blessing here stated, namely, in THE DELIVERANCE implied in the words, "that whosoever believeth in him should *not perish*."

I understand that word to mean that whosoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall not perish, though he is ready to perish. His sins would cause him to perish, but he shall never perish. At first he has a little hope in Christ, but its existence is feeble. It will soon die out, will it not? No, his faith shall not perish, for this promise covers it—

"Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish." The penitent has believed in Jesus, and therefore he has begun to be a Christian; "Oh," cries an enemy, "let him alone: he will soon be back among us; he will soon be as careless as ever." Listen. "Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish," and therefore he will not return to his former state. This proves the final perseverance of the saints; for if the believer ceased to be a believer he would perish; and as he cannot perish, it is clear that he will continue a believer. If thou believest in Jesus, thou shalt never leave off believing in him; for that would be to perish. If thou believest in him, thou shalt never delight in thine old sins; for that would be to perish. If thou believest in him, thou shalt never lose spiritual life. How canst thou lose that which is everlasting? If thou wert to lose it, it would prove that it was not everlasting, and thou wouldst perish; and thus thou wouldst make this word to be of no effect. Whosoever with his heart believeth in Christ is a saved man, not for to-night only, but for all the nights that ever shall be, and for that dread night of death, and for that solemn eternity which draws so near. "Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish;" but he shall have a life that cannot die, a justification that cannot be disputed, an acceptance which shall never cease.

What is it to perish? It is to lose all hope in Christ, all trust in God, all light in life, all peace in death, all joy, all bliss, all union with God. This shall never happen to thee if thou believest in Christ. If thou believest, thou shalt be chastened when thou dost wrong, for every child of God comes under discipline; and what son is there whom the Father chasteneth not? If thou believest, thou mayest doubt and fear as to thy state, as a man on board a ship may be tossed about; but thou hast gotten on board a ship that never can be wrecked. He that hath union with Christ has union with perfection, omnipotence and glory. He that believeth is a member of Christ: will Christ lose his members? How should Christ be perfect if he lost even his little finger? Are Christ's members to rot off, or to be cut off? Impossible. If thou hast faith in Christ thou art a partaker of Christ's life, and thou canst not perish. If men were trying to drown me, they could not drown my foot as long as I had my head above water; and as long as our Head is above water, up yonder in the eternal sunshine, the least limb of his body can never be destroyed. He that believeth in Jesus is united to him, and he must live because Jesus lives. Oh what a word is this, "I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand." I feel that I have a grand gospel to preach to you when I read that whosoever believeth in Jesus shall not perish. I would not give two pins for that trumpery, temporary salvation which some proclaim, which floats the soul for a time and then ebbs away to apostasy. I do not believe that the man who is once in Christ may live in sin and delight in it, and yet be saved. That is abominable teaching, and none of mine. But I believe that the man who is in Christ will *not* live in sin, for he is saved from it; nor will he return to his old sins and abide in them, for the grace of God will continue to save him from his sins. Such a change is wrought by regeneration that the newborn

man cannot abide in sin, nor find comfort in it, but he loves holiness and makes progress in it. The Ethiopian may change his skin, and the leopard his spots, but only grace divine can work the change; and when divine grace has done the deed the blackamore will remain white, and the leopard's spots will never return. It would be as great a miracle to undo the work of God as to do it; and to destroy the new creation would require as great a power as to make it. As only God can create, so only God can destroy; and he will never destroy the work of his own hands. Will God begin to build and not finish? Will he commence a warfare and end it before he has won the victory? What would the devil say if Christ were to begin to save a soul and fail in the attempt? If there should come to be souls in hell that were believers in Christ, and yet did perish, it would cast a cloud upon the diadem of our exalted Lord. It cannot, shall not, be. Such is the love of God, that whosoever believeth in his dear Son shall not perish: in this assurance we greatly rejoice.

V. The last commendation of his love lies in *the positive*—IN THE POSSESSION. I shall have to go in a measure over the same ground again Let me therefore be the shorter. God gives to every man that believes in Christ everlasting life. The moment thou believest there trembles into thy bosom a vital spark of heavenly flame which never shall be quenched. In that same moment when thou dost cast thyself on Christ, Christ comes to thee in the living and incorruptible word which liveth and abideth for ever. Though there should drop into thy heart but one drop of the heavenly water of life, remember this,—he hath said it who cannot lie,—"The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." When I first received everlasting life I had no idea what a treasure had come to me. I knew that I had obtained something very extraordinary, but of its superlative value I was not aware. I did but look to Christ in the little chapel, and I received eternal life. I looked to Jesus, and he looked on me; and we were one for ever. That moment my joy surpassed all bounds, just as my sorrow had aforetime driven me to an extreme of grief. I was perfectly at rest in Christ, satisfied with him, and my heart was glad; but I did not know that this grace was everlasting life till I began to read in the Scriptures, and to know more fully the value of the jewel which God had given me. The next Sunday I went to the same chapel, as it was very natural that I should. But I never went afterwards, for this reason, that during my first week the new life that was in me had been compelled to fight for its existence, and a conflict with the old nature had been vigorously carried on. This I knew to be a special token of the indwelling of grace in my soul; but in that same chapel I heard a sermon upon "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" And the preacher declared that Paul was not a Christian when he had that experience. Babe as I was, I knew better than to believe so absurd a statement. What but divine grace could produce such a sighing and crying after deliverance from indwelling sin? I felt that a person who could talk such nonsense knew little of the life of a true believer. I said to myself, "What! am I not alive because I feel a conflict within me? I never felt this fight when I was an unbeliever. When I was not a Christian I never groaned

to be set free from sin. This conflict is one of the surest evidences of my new birth, and yet this man cannot see it; he may be a good exhorter to sinners, but he cannot feed believers." I resolved to go into that pasture no more, for I could not feed therein. I find that the struggle becomes more and more intense; each victory over sin reveals another army of evil tendencies, and I am never able to sheathe my sword, nor cease from prayer and watchfulness.

I cannot advance an inch without praying my way, nor keep the inch I gain without watching and standing fast. Grace alone can preserve and perfect me. The old nature will kill the new nature if it can; and to this moment the only reason why my new nature is not dead is this —because it cannot die. If it could have died, it would have been slain long ago; but Jesus said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life"; "he that believeth on me hath everlasting life"; and therefore the believer cannot die. The only religion which will save you is one that you cannot leave, because it possesses you, and will not leave you. If you hold a doctrine which you can give up, give it up; but if the doctrines are burnt into you so that as long as you live you must hold them, and so that if you were burnt every ash would hold that same truth in it, because you are impregnated with it, then you have found the right thing. You are not a saved man unless Christ has saved you for ever. But that which has such a grip of you that its grasp is felt in the core of your being is the power of God. To have Christ living in you, and the truth ingrained in your very nature—O sirs, *this* is the thing that saves the soul, and nothing short of it. It is written in the text, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." What is this but a life that shall last through your three-score years and ten; a life that shall last you should you outlive a century; a life that will still flourish when you lie at the grave's mouth; a life that will abide when you have quitted the body, and left it rotting in the tomb; a life that will continue when your body is raised again, and you shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; a life that will outshine those stars and yon sun and moon; a life that shall be co-eval with the life of the Eternal Father? As long as there is a God, the believer shall not only exist, but live. As long as there is a heaven, you shall enjoy it; as long as there is a Christ, you shall live in his love; and as long as there is an eternity, you shall continue to fill it with delight.

God bless you and help you to believe in Jesus.—Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John iii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—291, 538, 539.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

RUTH'S REWARD; OR, CHEER FOR CONVERTS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, JUNE 29TH, 1884, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."—Ruth ii. 12.

THIS was the language of Boaz, a man of substance and of note in Bethlehem, to a poor stranger of whom he had heard that she had left her kindred, and the idols of her nation, that she might become a worshipper of the living and true God. He acted a noble part when he cheered her, and bade her be of good courage, now that she was casting in her lot with Naomi and the chosen nation. Observe that he saluted her with words of tender encouragement; for this is precisely what I want all the elder Christians among you to do to those who are the counterparts of Ruth. You who have long been believers in the Lord Jesus, who have grown rich in experience, who know the love and faithfulness of our covenant God, and who are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might; I want you to make a point of looking out the young converts, and speaking to them goodly words, and comfortable words, whereby they may be cheered and strengthened. There is a text, a very short one, which I would like often to preach from in reference to those who are newly saved, and I would invite you continually to be practising it: that text is, "*Encourage him.*" So many will throw cold water upon the aspirant after holiness, that I would urge others of you heartily to cheer him. Where spiritual life is weak, it should be nurtured with affectionate care. We desire to cherish, not to censure. That the lambs may grow they must be shepherded. That the tender babes in the household may become strong members of the divine family, they must be nursed and fed. If Ruth is to be happy in the land of Israel a Boaz must look after her, and be her true friend. Let her nearest kinsmen be speedy in fulfilling this duty.

I have no doubt that much sorrow might be prevented if words of encouragement were more frequently spoken fitly and in season; and therefore to withhold them is sin. I am afraid that many poor souls have remained in darkness, shut in within themselves, when two or three

minutes' brotherly cheer might have taken down the shutters, and let in the light of day. Many matters are real difficulties to young believers, which are no difficulties to us who have been longer in the way. You and I could clear up in ten minutes' conversation questions and doubts which cause our uninstructed friends months of misery. Why are we so reticent when a word would send our weaker brethren on their way rejoicing? Therefore, I do entreat all of you whom God has greatly blessed, to look after those that are of low estate in spiritual things, and try to cheer and encourage them. As you do this, God will bless you in return; but, if you neglect this tender duty, it may be that you yourselves will grow despondent, and be yourselves in need of friendly succour. Encouragement is due to young converts: every Ruth ought to be comforted when she casts in her lot with the people of God.

I think I can say for every Christian here, that the young converts among us have our very best wishes. We desire for them every good and spiritual gift. It will be our wisdom to turn our kindly wishes into prayers. Wishes are lame, but prayer has legs, ay, wings, with which it runs, and even flies, towards God. Wishes are baskets, but prayer fills them with bread. Wishes are clouds, but prayer is the rain. See how Boaz, wishing well as he did to the humble maiden from Moab, spoke with her, and then spoke with God in prayer for her. I take it that my text is a prayer as well as a benediction:—"Jehovah recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of Jehovah, God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Let us pray more than ever for the feeble-minded and the young. Think of them whenever the king grants you an audience. Search them out with kindly care, as a shepherd looks for his young lambs; and then lay them in the bosom of your love, and carry them over rough places.

We should, in all probability, see a much more rapid growth in grace among our young converts if they were better nursed and watched over. Some of us owed much to old-experienced Christians in our younger days. I know I did. I shall for ever respect the memory of a humble servant in the school wherein I was usher, at Newmarket; an old woman, who talked with me concerning the things of the kingdom, and taught me the way of the Lord more perfectly. She knew the doctrines of grace better than many a doctor of divinity; and she held them with the tenacious grasp of one who found her life in them. It was my great privilege to help her in her old age; and but a little while ago she passed away to heaven. Many things did I learn of her, which to-day I delight to preach. Let it be said of us, when we, too, grow old, that those who were children when we were young were helped by us to become useful in their riper years. They will not forget us if we have been to them what Aquila and Priscilla were to Apollos, or Ananias to Paul, or Paul to Timothy. They will pray for us, and God will bless us in answer to their prayers when the grasshopper to us becomes a burden, and our infirmities are multiplied.

Having thus introduced the text, let us notice in this model word of encouragement, *what the convert has done* that we should encourage him; secondly, *what full reward that is which he will receive;* and, thirdly, following out the historical connection of the text, I should like to conclude by noticing *what figure sets forth this full reward*—a

reward which we desire for every Ruth who has left those who were outside of the covenant in Moab to come and join herself with the Israel of God, and the God of Israel.

I. First, then, WHAT HAS THE YOUNG CONVERT DONE ? We illustrate the subject by the instance of Ruth.

Many young converts deserve encouragement because *they have left all their old associates.* Ruth, no doubt, had many friends in her native country, but she tore herself away to cling to Naomi and her God. Perhaps she parted from a mother and a father ; if they were alive she certainly left them to go to the Israelites' country. Possibly she bade adieu to brothers and sisters, certainly she quitted old friends and neighbours ; for she resolved to go with Naomi, and share her lot. She said, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go : and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God : where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

The young convert is an emigrant from the world ; and has become, for Christ's sake, an alien. Possibly he had many companions, friends who made him merry after their fashion, men of fascinating manners, who could easily provoke his laughter, and make the hours dance by ; but, because he found in them no savour of Christ, he has forsaken them, and for Christ's sake they have forsaken him. Among his old associates he has become as a speckled bird, and they are all against him. You may, perhaps, have seen a canary which has flown from its home, where it enjoyed the fondness of its mistress : you have seen it out among the sparrows. They pursue it as though they would tear it into pieces, and they give it no rest anywhere. Just so the young convert, being no longer of the same feather as his comrades, is the subject of their persecution. He endures trials of cruel mockings, and these are as hot irons to the soul. He is now to them a hypocrite, and a fanatic ; they honour him with ridiculous names by which they express their scorn. In their hearts they crown him with a fool's cap, and write him down as both idiot and knave. He will need to exhibit years of holy living before they will be forced into respect for him ; and all this because he is quitting their Moab to join with Israel. Why should he leave them ? Has he grown better than they ? Does he pretend to be a saint ? Can he not drink with them as he once did ? He is a protest against their excesses, and men don't care for such protests. Can he not sing a jolly song as they do ? Forsooth, he has turned saint ; and what is a saint but a hypocrite ? He is a deal too precise and Puritanical, and is not to be endured in their free society. According to the grade in life, this opposition takes one form or another, but in no case does Moab admire the Ruth who deserts her idols to worship the God of Israel. It is not natural that the Prince of darkness should care to lose his subjects, or that the men of the world should love those who shame them.

Is it not most meet that you older Christian people, who have long been separated from the world, and are hardened against its jeers, should step in and defend the new-comers ? Should you not say, "Come you with us, and we will do you good : we will be better friends

to you than those you have left. We will accompany you on a better road than that from which you have turned; and we will find you better joys than worldlings can ever know"? When our great King is represented as saying to his spouse, "Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house," he adds, "so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord"; thus he gives her new company to supply the place of that which she gives up. Let us gather a hint from this, and make society for those whom the world casts out. Perhaps there has come into this house at this time a man or woman who has just rushed out of the City of Destruction, only too glad to be outside its walls. The poor soul does not know which way to run, only he knows that he must run away from his former evil place, for he finds that the city is to be destroyed. O brothers, while such fugitives are wondering which way to go, and their evil companions are inviting them to return, step in, and show them the true place of shelter. Run with them to the clefts of the Rock. Uplift them if they stumble; guide them if they miss their way. Keep off their former tempters; form a body-guard around them; escort them till they are out of immediate danger; charm them with your loving conversation till they forget their false friends. When Ruth had quitted her former connections, it was wise and kind for Boaz to address her in the words of comfort which I will again quote to you: "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust."

Next, Ruth, having left her old companions, had *come amongst strangers*. She was not yet at home in the land of Israel, but confessed herself "a stranger." She knew Naomi, but in the whole town of Bethlehem she knew no one else. When she came into the harvest-field the neighbours were there gleaning, but they were no neighbours of hers: no glance of sympathy fell upon her from them; perhaps they looked at her with cold curiosity. They may have thought, "What business has this Moabitess to come here to take away a part of the gleaning which belongs to the poor of Israel?" I know that such feelings do arise among country people when a stranger from another parish comes gleaning in the field. Ruth was a foreigner, and, of course, in their eyes an intruder. She felt herself to be alone, though under the wings of Israel's God. Boaz very properly felt that she should not think that courtesy and kindness had died out of Israel; and he made a point, though he was by far her superior in station, to go to her and speak a word of encouragement to her. Should not certain of you follow the same practice? May I not call you to do so at once? There will come into our assemblies those that have been lately impressed with a sense of their guilt, or have newly sought and found the Saviour: should they be suffered to remain strangers among us long? Should not recognition, companionship, and hospitality be extended to them to make them feel at home with us? I would sincerely assure any that have come to this Tabernacle for a time, and are still unnoticed, that they are singularly unfortunate; for, as a rule, a stranger is looked after; and in every case he will be welcomed. If you have been overlooked you must have been sitting in rather an odd part of the building, for certain of our friends give themselves to the work of hunting up new-

comers, and conversing with them; so much so that now and then I get complaints of their supposed intrusion, which complaints much delight me, for they show that earnestness still survives among us. Be prudent, gentle, and courteous, of course; but do be on the watch for any who are seeking the Lord, and are desirous to unite with his people. I have occasionally to hear a friend say, "Sir, I attended your ministry for months, but those who sat with me in the pew never took the slightest notice of me. I often wished they would, for I was really desirous to be led by the hand to the Saviour." I do not like to hear that accusation. I would infinitely rather that people should complain that you spoke too much of religion to them than that you never said a word. Your supposed intrusion might be greatly to your credit, but your silent indifference must be to your dishonour. Do let us try with all our hearts so to look every man upon the things of others that no single seeking soul shall feel itself deserted. Seekers should be spared the agony of crying, "No man careth for my soul." Are you a believer? Then you are my brother. We are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God. We would lay ourselves out to bring our fellow-men to Jesus, and to aid new converts in finding perfect peace at his feet. Let us learn the art of personal address. Do not let us be so bashful and retiring that we leave others in sorrow because we cannot screw up our courage to say a kind and tender word in the name of the Lord Jesus. Come, let us pluck up courage, and encourage every Ruth when she is timid among strangers. Let us help her to feel at home in Immanuel's land.

The new convert is like Ruth in another respect: he is *very lowly in his own eyes*. Ruth said to Boaz, "Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" She said again, "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." She had little self-esteem, and therefore she won the esteem of others. She felt herself to be a very inconsiderable person, to whom any kindness was a great favour; and so do young converts, if they are real and true. We meet with a certain class of them who are rather pert and forward, as the fashion of the day is in certain quarters; and then we do not think so much of *them* as they do of themselves; but the genuine ones, who are truly renewed, and who really hold out, and continue to the end, are always humble, and frequently very trembling, timid, and diffident. They feel that they are not worthy to be put among the children, and they come to the Lord's table with holy wonder. I remember when I first went to the house of God as a Christian youth, who had lately come to know the Lord, that I looked with veneration on every officer and member of the church. I thought them all, if not quite angels, yet very nearly as good; at any rate, I had no disposition to criticise *them*, for I felt myself to be so undeserving. I do not think that I have quite so high an idea of all professed Christians as I had then, for I am afraid that I could not truthfully entertain it; but, for all that, I think far better of them than many are apt to do. I believe that young people, when first brought to Christ, have so deep a sense of their own imperfection, and know so

little of the infirmities of others, that they look up to the members of the church with a very high esteem, and this fixes upon such members, officers, and pastors a great responsibility. Since these converts are lowly in their own eyes it is proper and safe to encourage them; moreover, it is kind and needful to do so. Never be critical and severe with them, but deal tenderly with their budding graces; a frosty sentence may nip them; a genial word will develop them. Our Lord bids you feed the lambs; act the shepherd towards them, and never overdrive them, lest they faint by the way. It is a lovely sight to see a matronly Christian cheering on her class of girls, bearing with their waywardness and folly, and fostering everything that is hopeful in them. These are the mothers in Israel, to whom shall be honour. I love to see the advanced man of God giving a hearty grip to a youth, loving him, and advising him, ay, and adding a word of praise when it can be judiciously applied. With unequal footsteps the raw recruits are trying to keep step with the better-trained soldiers; let their comrades smile upon them, and see in them the warriors of the future, who shall rally to the standard when our warfare is ended

Once more, the young convert is like Ruth because he has *come to trust under the wings of Jehovah, the God of Israel.* Herein is a beautiful metaphor. You know that the wing of a strong bird especially, and of any bird relatively, is strong. It makes a kind of arch, and from the outer side you have the architectural idea of strength. Under the wings, even of so feeble a creature as a hen, there is a complete and perfect refuge for her little chicks, judging from without. And then the inside of the wing is lined with soft feathers for the comfort of the young. The interior of the wing is arranged as though it would prevent any friction from the strength of the wing to the weakness of the little bird. I do not know of a more snug place than under the wing-feathers of the hen. Have you never thought of this? Would not the Lord have us in time of trouble come and cower down under the great wing of his omnipotent love, just as the chicks do under the mother? Here is the Scripture—"He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler." What a warm defence! When I have seen the little birds put their heads out from under the feathers of their mother's breast it has looked like the perfection of happiness; and when they have chirped their little notes, they have seemed to tell how warm and safe they were, though there may have been a rough wind blowing around the hen. They could not be happier than they are. If they run a little way, they are soon back again to the wing, for it is house and home to them; it is their shield and succour, defence and delight. This is what our young converts have done: they have come, not to trust themselves, but to trust in Jesus. They have come to find a righteousness in Christ,—ay, to find everything in him, and so they are trusting, trusting under the wings of God. Is not this what you are doing? You full-grown saints—is not this your condition? I know it is. Very well then; encourage the younger sort to do what you delight to do: say to them, "There is no place like this: let us joyously abide together under the wing of God." There is no rest, no peace, no calm, no perfect quiet, like that of giving up all care, because you cast your

care on God; renouncing all fear, because your only fear is a fear of offending God. Oh the bliss of knowing that sooner may the universe be dissolved than the great heart that beats above you cease to be full of tenderness and love to all those that shelter beneath it. Faith, however little, is a precious plant of the Lord's right hand planting; do not trample on it, but tend it with care, and water it with love.

II. But now I must come closer to the text. Having shown you what these converts have done to need encouragement, I want, in the second place, to answer the question, WHAT IS THE FULL REWARD OF THOSE WHO COME TO TRUST UNDER THE WINGS OF GOD?

I would answer that a full reward will come to us in that day when we lay down these bodies of flesh and blood, that they may sleep in Jesus, while our unclothed spirits are absent from the body but present with the Lord. In the disembodied state we shall enjoy perfect happiness of spirit; but a fuller reward will be ours when the Lord shall come a second time, and our bodies shall rise from the grave to share in the glorious reign of the descended King. Then in our perfect manhood we shall behold the face of him we love, and shall be like him. Then shall come the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body; and we, as body, soul, and spirit, a trinity in unity, shall be for ever with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, our triune God. This unspeakable bliss is the full reward of trusting beneath the wings of Jehovah.

But there is a present reward, and to that Boaz referred. There is in this world a present recompense for the godly, notwithstanding the fact that many are the afflictions of the righteous. Years ago a brother minister printed a book, "How to Make the Best of Both Worlds," which contained much wisdom; but at the same time many of us objected to the title, as dividing the pursuit of the believer, and putting the two worlds too much on a level. Assuredly, it would be wrong for any godly man to make it his object in life to make the best of both worlds in the way which the title is likely to suggest. This present world must be subordinate to the world to come, and is to be cheerfully sacrificed to it, if need be. Yet, be it never forgotten, if any man will live unto God he will make the best of both worlds, for godliness has the promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. Even in losing the present life for Christ's sake we are saving it, and self-denial and taking up the cross are but forms of blessedness. If we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all other things shall be added to us.

Do you ask me, "How shall we be rewarded for trusting in the Lord?" I answer, first, by the *deep peace of conscience* which he will grant you. Can any reward be better than this? When a man can say, "I have sinned, but I am forgiven," is not that forgiveness an unspeakable boon? My sins were laid on Jesus, and he took them away as my scapegoat, so that they are gone for ever, and I am consciously absolved. Is not this a glorious assurance? Is it not worth worlds? A calm settles down upon the heart which is under the power of the blood of sprinkling; a voice within proclaims the peace of God, and the Holy Spirit seals that peace by his own witness; and thus all is rest. If you were to offer all that you have to buy this peace,

you could not purchase it; but were it purchasable it were worth while to forego the dowry of a myriad worlds to win it. If you had all riches and power and honour you could not reach the price of the pearl of peace. The revenues of kingdoms could not purchase so much as a glance at this jewel. A guilty conscience is the undying worm of hell; the torture of remorse is the fire that never can be quenched: he that hath that worm gnawing at his heart and that fire burning in his bosom is lost already. On the other hand, he that trusts in God through Christ Jesus is delivered from inward hell-pangs: the burning fever of unrest is cured. He may well sing for joy of soul, for heaven is born within him and lies in his heart like the Christ in the manger. O harps of glory, ye ring out no sweeter note than that of transgression put away by the atoning sacrifice!

That, however, is only the beginning of the believer's reward. He that has come to trust in God shall be "*quiet from fear of evil.*" What a blessing that must be! "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." When a man is at his very highest as to this world's joy, he hears the whisper of a dark spirit saying, "Will it last?" He peers into the morrow with apprehension, for he knows not what may be lurking in his path. But, when a man is no longer afraid, but is prepared to welcome whatever comes, because he sees in it the appointment of a loving Father, why, then he is in a happy state. Suppose one went home to-night and found, as Job did, that all his estate had been burned or stolen, and that his family had all died on a sudden, what a splendid condition must he be in if he could say amid his natural agony, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"! Such possession of the soul in patience is one of the full rewards of faith. He that has it wears a nobler decoration within his breast than all the stars that royalty could bestow. Deliverance from the pangs of conscience and freedom from the griefs of fear make up a choice favour such as only God can give.

More than this: the man who trusts in God *rests in him with respect to all the supplies he now needs, or shall ever need.* What happy music gladdens the green pastures of that twenty-third psalm! I am half inclined to ask you to rise and sing it, for my heart is leaping for joy while I rehearse the first stanza of it:

> "The Lord my Shepherd is:
> I shall be well supplied.
> Since he is mine and I am his,
> What can I want beside?"

Usually man is made up of wants; and *he* must have reached the land of abounding wealth who boldly asks, "What can I want beside?" We are never quite content; it always needs a little more to fill the cup to the brim; but only think of singing, "What can I want beside?" Is not this sweet content a full reward from the Lord in whom we trust? Human nature has swallowed a horse-leech, and henceforth it crieth night and day, "Give, give, give": who but the Lord can stay this craving? The vortex of dissatisfaction threatens to suck in the main ocean and still to remain unfilled; but the Lord

rewards faith by satisfying its mouth with good things, and making it sing:

"What want shall not our God supply
From his redundant stores?
What streams of mercy from on high
An arm almighty pours!"

I cannot imagine a fuller present reward than complete rest from all anxiety, and calm confidence in a providence which can never fail.

Another part of the believer's great gain lies in *the consciousness that all things are working together for his good.* Nothing is, after all, able to injure us. Neither pains of body, nor sufferings of mind, nor losses in business, nor cruel blows of death, can work us real ill. The thefts of robbers, the mutterings of slanderers, the changes of trade, the rage of the elements, shall all be overruled for good. These many drugs and poisons, compounded in the mortar of the unerring Chemist, shall produce a healthy potion for our souls: "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." It is a great joy to know this to be an unquestionable fact, and to watch with expectation to see it repeated in our own case. It takes the sting at once out of all these wasps that otherwise would have worried us, and it transforms them into bees, each one gathering honey for us. Is not this a reward for which a man may well forego the flatteries of sin? O faith, thou enrichest and ennoblest all who entertain thee!

Then, let me tell you, they that trust in God and follow him have another full reward, and that is, *the bliss of doing good.* Can any happiness excel this? This joy is a diamond of the first water. Match me, if you can, the joy of helping the widow and the fatherless! Find me the equal of the delight of saving a soul from death and covering a multitude of sins. It were worth worlds to have faith in God even if we lived here for ever, if our sojourn could be filled up with doing good to the poor and needy, and rescuing the erring and fallen. If you desire to taste the purest joy that ever flowed from the founts of Paradise, drink of the unselfish bliss of saving a lost soul. When faith in God teaches you to forego self, and live wholly to glorify God and benefit your fellow-men, it puts you on the track of the Lord of angels, and by following it you will come to reign with him.

There has lately passed away from our midst on this side of the river one who in his earlier days knew the curse of drunkenness, but was led by hearing the gospel in the street to seek and find a Saviour, and so to escape from the bondage of an evil habit. He became a Christian temperance man, devoting himself, I was about to say, every day in the week, to the cause, for I think he did so; all his spare time was spent for that sacred purpose. He has lately passed away, but not without having enjoyed a reward from his God. When I used to look into the face of our friend Mr. Thorniloe I felt that he had received a full return for casting himself upon the Lord; for the joy of his heart shone in his countenance, and delight in his work caused it to be his recreation. O drunkard, if you could become such as he was, total abstinence would be no trial, but a pleasure! O idle professor, if you would be as diligent in serving your Lord as he was, life would be music to you.

He who has himself fallen into a sin should find his chief joy in seeking to reclaim others from the like condemnation, and in doing so he will light upon clouds of felicities and flocks of joys. As a shepherd rejoiceth most when he has found his straying sheep, so will you who trust in the Lord if you will in future lay yourselves out to pluck men from eternal ruin.

Brothers and sisters, there remains the singular and refined joy which comes of a humble *perception of personal growth.* Children rejoice when they find that they are growing more like their parents and may soon hope to be strong and full-grown. Most of us recollect our childish mirth when we began to wear garments which we thought would make us look like men. When I first wore boots and walked through the stubble with my big uncle, I felt that I was somebody. That, of course, was childish pride; but it has its commendable analogy in the pleasure of gathering spiritual strength, and becoming equal to higher labours and deeper experiences. When you find that you do not lose your temper under provocation, as you did a year ago, you are humbly thankful. When an evil lust is driven away, and no longer haunts you, you are quietly joyful, rejoicing with trembling. When you have sustained a trial which once would have crushed you, the victory is exceedingly sweet. Every advance in holiness is an advance in secret happiness. To be a little more meet for heaven is to have a little more of heaven in the heart. As we mellow for the celestial garner we are conscious of a more pervading sweetness, which in itself is no mean reward of virtue.

Let me tell you another splendid part of this full reward, and that is, to have *prevalence with God in prayer.* Somebody called me, in print, a hypocrite, because I said that God had heard my prayers. This was evidently malicious: a man might be called fanatical for such a statement, but I cannot see the justice of imputing hypocrisy on that account. If by hypocrisy be meant a sincere conviction that the great God answers prayer, I will be more and more hypocritical as long as I live. I will glory in the name of God—the God that heareth my prayer. If that writer had claimed that *he* prayed and had been heard, it is possible that he would have been guilty of hypocrisy: of that matter he is personally the best informed, and I leave the question with himself; but he has no right to measure my corn with his bushel. Certainly, I shall not use his bushel to measure my corn, but I shall speak what I know and am persuaded of. In deep sincerity I can bear testimony that the Lord hears prayer, and that it is his wont so to do. Many a saint of God has but to ask and have. When such men wrestle with God in prayer they always prevail, like Israel of old at Jabbok when he grasped the angel, and would not let him go without a blessing. If you have got this power to the full you will often say to yourself, "If I had nothing else but power at the throne of grace I have more than enough to recompense me for every self-denial." What are the jests and jeers of an ungodly and ignorant world in comparison with the honour of being favoured of the Lord to ask what we will, and receive the utmost of our desires?

Many other items make up the full of the reward; but perhaps the chief of all is *communion with God*—to be permitted to speak with him

as a man speaketh with his friend—to be led by the divine Bridegroom to sit down in the banqueting-house while his banner over us is love. Those who dwell outside the palace of love know nothing about our secret ecstasies and raptures. We cannot tell them much about our spiritual delights, for they would only turn again and rend us. The delights of heavenly fellowship are too sacred to be commonly displayed. There is a joy, the clearest antepast of heaven below, when the soul becomes as the chariot of Amminadib by the energy of the Holy Spirit. I believe, brethren, that our lot, even when we are poor and sorrowful and cast down, is infinitely to be preferred to that of the loftiest emperor who does not know the Saviour. Oh, poor kings, poor princes, poor peers, poor gentry, that do not know Christ ! But happy paupers that know him ! Happy slaves that love him ! Happy dying men and women that rejoice in him ! Those have solid joy and lasting pleasure who have God to be their all in all. Come, then, and put your trust under the wings of God, and you shall be blessed in your body and in your soul, blessed in your house and in your family, blessed in your basket and in your store, blessed in your sickness and in your health, blessed in time and in eternity ; for the righteous are blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them. My prayer for every young convert is the benediction of Boaz, "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." May this benediction rest on each one of you for ever.

III. Finally, WHAT FIGURE SETS FORTH THIS FULL REWARD ? What was the full reward that Ruth obtained ? I do not think that Boaz knew the full meaning of what he said. He could not foresee all that was appointed of the Lord. In the light of Ruth's history we will read the good man's blessing. This poor stranger, Ruth, in coming to put her trust in the God of Israel was giving up everything : yes, but she was also gaining everything. If she could have looked behind the veil which hides the future, she could not have conducted herself more to her own advantage than she did. She had no prospect of gain ; she followed Naomi, expecting poverty and obscurity ; but in doing that which was right, she found the blessing which maketh rich. She lost her Moabitish kindred, but she found a noble kinsman in Israel. She quitted the home of her fathers in the other land to find a heritage among the chosen tribes, a heritage redeemed by one who loved her. Ah ! when you come to trust in Christ, you find in the Lord Jesus Christ one who is next of kin to you, who redeems your heritage, and unites you to himself. You thought that he was a stranger ; you were afraid to approach him ; but he comes near to you, and you find yourself near to his heart, and one with him for ever.

Yes, this is a fair picture of each convert's reward. Ruth found what she did not look for, she found a husband. It was exactly what was for her comfort and her joy, for she found rest in the house of her husband, and she became possessed of his large estate by virtue of her marriage union with him. When a poor sinner trusts in God he does not expect so great a boon, but, to his surprise, his heart finds a husband, and a home, and an inheritance priceless beyond all conception ; and all this is found in Christ Jesus our Lord. Then is the soul brought

into loving, living, lasting, indissoluble union with the Well-beloved, the unrivalled Lord of love. We are one with Jesus. What a glorious mystery is this!

Ruth obtained an inheritance among the chosen people of Jehovah. She could not have obtained it except through Boaz, who redeemed it for her; but thus she came into indisputable possession of it. When a poor soul comes to God, he thinks that he is flying to him only for a refuge, but, indeed, he is coming for much more; he is coming for a heritage undefiled, and that fadeth not away. He becomes an heir of God, a joint-heir with Jesus Christ.

As I conclude I bear this my personal testimony to the benefit of godliness for this life. Apart from the glories of heaven I would wish to live trusting in my God, and resting in him for this present life; since I need his present aid for every day as truly as I shall need it at the last day. Men speak of *secularism* as attending to the things which concern our present life, and I am bold to assert that the purest and best secularism is that which trusts itself with God for things immediately around us. We shall be wise to make secular things sacred by trusting them with God. Faith is not for eternity alone, but for this fleeting hour also: it is good for the shop and for the market-place, for the field and for the domestic hearth. For the cares of the moment, as well as for all else, we take refuge under the wings of God. There shall we be blessed for Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.—Ruth ii. 1—14; Proverbs iii.

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THE MODERN DEAD SEA, AND THE LIVING WATERS.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, JULY 19TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"The waters shall be healed."—Ezekiel xlvii. 8.

EZEKIEL is robed in dreadful tempest, and his whole book is "as the terrible crystal" for brightness, and for mystery; yet he often gives us visions of exceeding comfort. For instance, who can think without joy of that tender branch of the cedar which is to be planted by God in the mountain of the height of Israel, which shall grow so exceedingly that all fowl of every wing shall dwell in its branches? Do we not all rejoice that, whatever may become of the institutions of modern society, we have received a kingdom which cannot be moved? The kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ, which began as a tender slip, is yet to increase till it is likened to a goodly cedar "upon a high mountain and eminent": is not this a joy unspeakable? Think also of that other vision, so weird and strange, of a valley full of dead bones "very many" and "very dry." What an answer does that vision give to the question of unbelief! "Can these dry bones live?" How plainly doth the Lord answer: "I will put my spirit in you, and ye shall live"! When I think of that goodly cedar, I see that the kingdom will come unto Christ; and when I think of the valley of dry bones, I am comforted concerning the masses around me. We, too, as we walk through this charnel-house of a city, may hope that life will conquer death, and an exceeding great army, quickened by the Spirit of our God, shall yet rise from these dry bones.

The remarkable vision, which lies open before us, is exceedingly reassuring to those who are troubled by reason of the dreadful condition of the times—and which of us is not? The prophet bids us think of those waters, drear and dreadful, known by the suggestive name of the Dead Sea! This was the "Chamber of Horrors" of the land of Canaan. Travellers describe it as a place of utter desolation. Lying in a deep hollow, some thirteen hundred feet below any other sea, the Dead Sea may be described as deep sunken into the earth, like the mouth of the abyss. Masses of bitumen float upon its surface, and line its shores. Sulphurous exhalations abound, and on its banks are hot sulphuric springs. Bathing in its thick brine is not pleasant, for it causes the skin

to tingle with its acrid salts long afterwards. It is not desirable to linger upon the brink of it, neither is there anything to attract you so to do. Very scanty is the vegetation, few are the birds, and rare the living things. It is the domain of destruction. The sea is so salt that no fish can live in it; and though it has been asserted that smaller organisms exist in it, these have seldom been found; but, on the contrary, the fish that come down into it from the Jordan die at once, and drifted shell-fish are washed up dead upon the bank. Nothing of life loves the brine, the sulphur, and the bitumen of the Dead Sea. The slimy lake is, at seasons, dangerous to health, and even to life. Travellers have of late crossed it safely at the right season; but formerly those who made a voyage upon it scarce returned to tell the tale, and before long sickened and died.

The doomed lake bears dark mysteries in its bosom; down deep in its depths lie the drowned cities of the plain, whose infamies provoked the wrath of heaven, and brought upon them a fire-shower such as earth has never known before or since. It may be that the briny waters hide mysteries of sin which were better hidden; for modern crime is fertile enough in inventions of filthiness, and needs no aid from the rottenness of antiquity. Thus, the Dead Sea is a place most dread and dismal, the bath of death, the haunt of despair, the home of desolation; and in these respects it is a fit picture of our fallen humanity, a truthful symbol of the whole world, which lieth in the wicked one. The world of men is cursed by evils of dreadful name. "The dark places of the earth are full of the habitations of cruelty." Mysteries of love in this lost world there are none; but mysteries of sin, and of judgment, and of the wrath of God, there are, in plenty. The world is a veritable Dead Sea upon a gigantic scale. Such also is the city in which we live: must I call it "modern Sodom"? Every wave that breaks upon the shore of this human lake now seems to wash up remains of monstrous things, unearthly, inhuman, beastly, devilish. Fair islands, here and there, rise out of its dark deeps, the bright creations of God's grace; but all around them the waters cast up mire and dirt. God is at work creating new heavens and a new earth, and in the process forms of beauty are developed; but to this day the old unrenewed city remains a reeking copy of the hell which burns below. Those who have dared to look into its depths return with horror upon their faces to say that it were not lawful for a man to utter what they have seen. London is a simmering cauldron of vice and crime. O God! how long shall it be?

In certain respects such is every man's natural heart until he is renewed by grace. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, and may be well typified by the Sea of Death. If we could but look into it with such eyes as God hath, what should we not see? When we are led to gaze on it through our tears, because the Holy Spirit hath anointed our eyes with eye-salve, and we perceive things in their naked truth, we are distressed beyond expression. What a thing is human nature! Mr. Whitefield used to say that man is half beast and half devil; but to my mind he is all beast and all devil if God does not hold him in check by the restraints of fear and the fetters of law. Let him alone, and who can imagine what man would grow to? All manner of iniquities, such as lust, and greed, and oppression, and

drunkenness, and falsehood, and cruelty, and murder lurk within the human heart, like wild beasts in the jungle. No man knoweth what villany he is capable of: he only needs to be placed under certain circumstances, and he will develop into a very fiend. Thus the world, the city, the heart are each symbolized by the Dead Sea. Can they ever be purged? Can these waters be healed? According to our text, the Lord saith expressly, "*the waters shall be healed.*" Let us believe his promise, and take heart of hope from this good hour. Here is room, my brethren, for the faith which, like charity, "believeth all things, hopeth all things." If any of you desire to exercise a faith by which you can glorify God, believe that the world can yet be delivered from sin; believe that London can yet be made a holy city; believe that your own heart, by the power of God's Spirit, can be purified even as Christ is pure. Even when it seems to be furthest off from hope, even when we are staggered at the sin which surrounds us, we are still to believe that the Lord shall reign for ever and ever, and sin and Satan shall be crushed under our Redeemer's foot. Let us believe in God as God deserves to be believed in: let us rely implicitly upon Omnipotence, and trust without a doubt in that strong will which can never be turned from its purpose of grace. "*The waters shall be healed*": all the brine and bitumen of the Dead Sea shall not stay the divine work. The putrid waters of London shall be made sweet as the well of Bethlehem. The atrocities of war and oppression shall cease, and the reign of evil shall end; for the Lord hath purposed it, and it shall be done. The kingdoms of this world must become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; London must be won for Jesus; and our own hearts must be wholly his. "*The waters shall be healed.*"

Ezekiel saw in vision the means of the healing of the drear Lake of Death: the method was simple, but effectual. What he saw represented the gospel dispensation. The whole system of divine grace, the gospel attended by the power of the Holy Spirit, the cross and all the truths that come out of it, the message of salvation, the preaching of faith, the testimony of God the Father to the redeeming work of his Son: all this is the river which flows down into this desert world by its own force, and is now making its way into the most horrible guilt and corruption, with set purpose, that the waters may be healed. I want to encourage your faith this morning in a time when that faith is very sorely tried. Be of good courage, for the waters, of which we all loathe to drink, shall be purified. "*The waters shall be healed.*"

I. And, first, to encourage your faith, I bid you to CONSIDER THE PROMISE. The place wherein the promise is written, in plain black and white, upon the sacred page, is opened before your eyes. Put your finger on it, and let it rest there. Thus saith Jehovah: "*The waters shall be healed.*"

We feel sure that this word of prophecy shall be accomplished to the letter in due time, because *he that made the promise is able to fulfil it.* Apart from us and all our weakness, apart from man and all his wickedness, God, who hath spoken the word, will perform it without fail. The Lord knows what he saith: he speaketh advisedly, and not after the manner of the rash and boastful; neither doth his hand

neglect to do what his lip hath promised. He brings his supreme power and Godhead to carry out the word of his mouth. The promise of grace is the fiat of Omnipotence—"The waters shall be healed." One "shall" of God is worth all the legions of an empire; yea, all the forces of the universe. "Shall," saith God, and the event is sure. What can resist the thunder of his word? Who shall stay his hand, or frustrate his design? Hear, O unbelief, and doubt no more: "*The waters shall be healed!*"

The Lord will fulfil this word thoroughly. This promise shall not be kept to the ear only, but it shall be fulfilled in the largest conceivable sense. The prophet, in vision, saw the waters of the Dead Sea so completely healed that there were fish in it; yes, swarms of fish, and these fish so many that there was occupation for all those who cast the net, so that they stood from one shore to the other. Where there had been no life aforetime, living things literally swarmed and teemed, as in the great main ocean itself. Brethren, when God speaks of what he is about to do in the world, by way of grace, interpret it very largely: get no narrow ideas into your minds concerning the grace of the Infinite. When our Lord Jesus sees of the travail of his soul and is satisfied, he will not have seen a handful of men here and there gathered to him, but he will have seen a multitude that no man can number worshipping the Father, each one of whom shall eternally bless his name for deliverance from sin. What hosts have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb! Ah! beloved, God will cleanse London perfectly clean when he puts his hand to it. Even this Augean stable shall yet be sacred as the temple of Jehovah! No cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter will God make, but he will purge out secret sins, both in high places and in cottages, and he will create for himself in this place a city of priests. Glory be to his name for such a hope! Blessed be the Lord God, he will sanctify our hearts and spirits; in the secret parts he will implant truth, and in the hidden parts he will make us to know wisdom!

Observe that when God makes the promise on which my finger is still resting—for I love to press the very words, "The waters shall be healed"—he gives us an idea of how he will do it. *He will fulfil this word in connection with the present dispensation.* To my mind this is clear enough, from the fact that these waters flowed forth from Mount Zion. They flowed originally from that ancient hill of which God had said, "Here will I dwell for ever." The healing stream proceeded from that sacred place, the Holy of Holies, on Mount Zion, which is the type of God's indwelling in his Son Jesus, and in his church. The rising river flowed hard by the altar of burnt-offering, and became visible to the prophetic eye as it trickled forth from under the closed door at the east end of the temple. These waters, in vision, were seen to flow towards the east, to create verdure in the desert, and to melt into the Dead Sea. From this I gather that our God means to use his church for his purposes of grace. "Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God hath shined." We believe that he means to win his ultimate triumphs by the preaching of the gospel. Whenever the coming of our Lord shall be—and oh, that it were to-day, for we never wanted him more than now!—whenever his second advent shall take place, yet it

shall not be a dishonour to the church, but it will be her glory to triumph with the King at her head. It may be that by his personal appearing she shall win the victory. If our Lord delayeth his coming, he will send the wondrous influences of the Divine Spirit in much greater abundance than to-day, and then his church shall work marvels in the land, and salvation shall adorn her. The King shall marshal his troops around the central city of his choice, and his church shall be glorious in the eyes of all men, because of the splendour of her Lord. Do not throw down your weapons, and say, "Christ must come and wage this war." Perhaps so; but still he will carry on the battle by his chosen people. It is ours to stand fast, like British squares in the day of battle. Hold the fort, because your Lord is coming. Do not abandon it under some idea that he will work after a novel fashion and dispense with the gospel and the testimony of his saints. I believe that the Lord Jesus will win the battle on the old lines: "Up, Guards, and at them!" Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning-hooks into spears: for you must fight as long as you live, since the Lord hath sworn to have war with Amalek from generation to generation. If you die at your posts, so be it; but never desert them. Till Jesus comes, gird yourselves and fight his battles; your rest remaineth, and it will be a full reward to you, but ye have not yet come unto it. By the river of God, which flows this day, *the waters shall be healed.*

Note, carefully, that this divine promise, "the waters shall be healed," *will not put aside instrumentality,* but when it is fulfilled it will call forth more abundant agencies. The waters run into the Dead Sea, and purify its waters; then fish begin to multiply, and then man's part comes in: "The fishers shall stand upon it from En-gedi even unto En-eglaim." Rest assured that there will be plenty of fishers when by his healing process the Lord makes plenty of fish: we shall be fishers of men in right earnest when the times of refreshing shall come from his presence. The Lord does not intend to put the fishers on one side, any more than he will dismiss the reapers in the time of harvest. Mark how the Lord Jesus said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." He never intends the gospel-net to be laid aside till all his elect are taken in it, and drawn out from the waters of sin and death. Those will be happy days when the Lord will cause the people to long for the gospel: when those horrid wretches, who are now lying asoak in the sulphurous lake of sin, shall become wholesome fish, and invite the fisher to cast his net. In those days many of you, my brethren, who never handled a net before, will be moved by a holy call to catch men; and you, my sisters, will have to help us with the rope to draw the net on shore. You, slothful Christian men and women, who have never gone to sea in this fishery, will then be moved to the work, and will say, like Peter, "I go a-fishing." All round the lake the prophet saw fishers, and he says of the waters, "They shall be a place to spread forth nets; their fish shall be according to their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many." Oh, for the day when every believer will be fishing for the souls of men! God send us that blessed time right speedily! On the strength of the promise now before us, if there were nothing else, let us look for such a consummation. "*The waters shall be healed*": purity shall prevail; the kingdom of God shall come. Our daily

prayer shall not go up to heaven in vain. Let us again cry—"Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen."

II. Having asked you to consider the promise, I invite you, next, to CONSIDER THE WONDER OF THE HEALING WATERS, that we may be helped thereby to believe that healing will come even to the Dead Sea of this present evil world, this present sinful Babylon, this present deceitful heart.

The wonders of the waters which Ezekiel saw lay in many things. First, consider, *whence they came?* These waters sprang from the midst of Jerusalem, from the secret place of God's throne; and this was why they were so potent. The twelfth verse ascribes the fruit-producing power of the river-waters to this—"because they issued out of the sanctuary." In that sanctuary was the throne of Jehovah: eternal sovereignty is the fountain-head of those gracious decrees in which the Lord hath purposed to do good to the sons of men. He will have mercy on whom he will have mercy; and in the freeness of his sovereign will he hath purposed that this Dead Sea of humanity shall yet be healed. The healing waters flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb. As God is God, he hath decreed and purposed to redeem his people; and in that decree and purpose is the fountain of good to men.

These waters flowed in the vision hard by the altar of burnt-offering. Learn hence that the one channel of mercy to the sons of men is by the sacrifice of Christ. By that altar, where our great High Priest offered up himself once for all, there flows the river of life. Since Christ hath died, the world must yet be blessed. Those drops of blood that fell on Calvary were never gathered up; and they have left the broad crimson mark of the redeeming Lord upon this globe of ours, and therefore his it must be. Mankind shall be delivered from utter destruction because in Christ Jesus our God has found a ransom. There is hope in this, that "*the waters shall be healed.*"

These waters, though they flowed unseen across the temple-area, presently bubbled up from under the threshold of the door of the house. You know who is the Door of the temple of God: by him we enter in unto God, and by him God cometh forth in blessing unto us. The waters flowed from below, welling up from "the deep that lieth under," in the person and work of our Lord. Salvation comes not to us from any of the sons of men, but from the deeps of God's own heart. Streams of ever-flowing mercy flow to us through our Lord Jesus Christ; blessed be his name!

When the waters first appeared, the prophet saw them trickling from under the closed door, and this suggests another interpretation. The east door was shut, according to the vision recorded in the previous chapter; but the waters gushed forth from under the threshold. Old Judaism had its door closed against us Gentiles, and yet the gospel came from it to the nations. Israel's door is now shut till the Prince shall come and enter through it: yet from under its threshold the river of the gospel flowed to us Gentiles. Holy men of Jewish race came forth to tell of salvation bought with blood, and justification perfected for faith; and by their means the heathen received the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The stream began in the eternal

purpose, it flowed through the sacrifice of Christ, and proceeded out of the midst of that old temple whose gate was shut. In Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth are blessed. Surely that which comes from God's purpose through the sacrifice of Christ cannot be in vain. If God could make old Judaism to bud and blossom with the gospel, what can he not do? If from under the shut gate the waters came gushing forth in gladsome stream to us perishing heathen, they can still flow to the vilest of the vile.

Note next, as a wonder in connection with these waters, *how they increased.* They deepened so fast that, although there was but a little streamlet at the beginning, within less than a mile there were waters to swim in; yea, they had become so deep and broad that the prophet had to use an expression in the dual, signifying a double stream: the flood had become too deep and wide to be passed over. These waters were not fed by rivulets running into them, but they miraculously grew of themselves. In the vision they advanced from being ankle deep to being up to the knee, and then up to the loins, and then they rose to be deep, unfathomable waters. All this the prophet tested by his own wading into them. Now, if this happened by God's power, and if this happened so speedily, we may look for other marvels: "the waters shall be healed": the Dead Sea shall yet teem with life. You and I have waded into these waters, have we not? If so, we know how they have increased upon us. Do you not remember when you rejoiced to have received a little grace, so that it washed your feet, and your life was cleansed? Do you not remember how very speedily these waters were up to your knees, and you had power with God in prayer? It was but a few hours more ere your heart was comforted, and your inmost spirit was made glad, for the waters were up to your loins. Very soon, perhaps within four-and-twenty hours, you were swimming in streams of heavenly love, as you found that Christ was yours, your God, your heaven, your all. Do you not see that the God who has done all this for you can do as much for others? Can he not heal the waters of the Dead Sea of our day? Let us hope on, work on, and believe in God to the end. Putting our finger again upon that promise, let us rest assured that "*the waters shall be healed.*"

Rapidly—for I have to be brief where there is so much to be said—notice *what these waters produced.* They began to flow, and very soon vegetation came into the wilderness. They flowed into the desert, and into the Acacia Vale, as Joel calls it; and soon, on both sides of the river, there were trees, and, on a sudden, the trees were bearing fruit. Wherever the gospel goes it carries life, and growth, and fruit with it. The fruits were for man's nourishment: these were the ordained food of Paradise, the best provender for man at his best. What food there is in the gospel! Wherever it flows, the famine of the soul ceases. The gospel contains all manner of fruit, for all sorts of seasons and appetites: food for the young, and food for the old; food for the feeble, and food for the strong; food for the happy, and food for the sad. This tree of life brings forth fruit abundantly, constantly, and speedily. The leaves of the trees of life contained medicine, full of mystic virtue; they were for the healing of the people. Whatever diseases afflict men, they have but to pluck these leaves, and apply them, and health follows.

Oh, that blessed gospel, it has had a double effect for our good, for it has fed our souls, and healed our infirmities! Well might its waters be called a double stream. Do you not know that it is thus singularly useful? If you have never eaten of its fruit, I must seem to be talking nonsense to you. If you have never been sick, and felt the healing power of its leaves, I must seem to mock you with delusions. But if you have been hungering and thirsting, you know what these streams and these fruits are; and if you have been sick unto death, you have found in God's grace a medicine better than the balm of Gilead, and it has made you whole. If the gospel can thus cause trees of life to grow, *the waters shall be healed:* the horrible Dead Sea of lust shall yet be purified, the sulphurous breath of vice shall yet be blown away, the death of sin shall yet give place to holy life, and the Lord alone shall be exalted where hitherto he has been dishonoured.

As a further wonder, note *whither the stream flowed.* One would have thought that such a clear crystal stream as this, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb, would have sought a pure channel for itself among the gardens of the Lord; but instead thereof, we are told, "These waters issue out toward the east country, and go down into the desert, and go into the sea: which, being brought forth into the sea, the waters shall be healed." What a mercy it is that the gospel does go into the desert! Think of what this island used to be, when our sires wandered about in their nakedness among its oak-groves. Think of the times when the great wicker image was set up, and the Druids surrounded it, and that image was crammed full of hundreds of men and women, who were all to be consumed in one dread fire, while the people stood by to see their fellow-creatures offered to their national Moloch. That is all over now. No longer is the mistletoe cut with the golden sickle, or the fierce deity appeased with blood of men. The missionary came and preached the gospel; and the Druids ceased out of the land. They were both the legislature and the hierarchy, but they could not stand before the divine truth. They were everybody *then*, but they are nobody *now.* I do not know what may happen here yet, but I do know this: that when the gospel comes, the images, the idols, the filthy things, the cruel things, the horrible things, must go. The gospel is still sent to sinners, and it will save sinners. We are to preach the gospel to every creature, "beginning at Jerusalem"; and he who bade us do this will not permit us to labour in vain. The river of life purified Britain once, and it will cleanse it yet again: "*The waters shall be healed.*"

The waters ran down into the horrible sea. You would have said as you stood there: "No, do not waste these pure floods in that hell-lake! Do not let them disappear in pollution! Jordan for many years has been lavishing her silver streams upon this Dead Sea, and it has absorbed them all, but it has not been made a whit the purer; and every fish that has drifted down the Jordan has died as soon as it has touched this detestable lake. Do not pour the heavenly river into such a Pandemonium." Many speak thus nowadays: "Do not meddle with this vice and wickedness. Do not even hear about it, for it will pollute you. Forget its foul flow; it is sulphurous as Tophet: the smell of such iniquity will choke you!" This avoidance of evil is natural and safe; but what is

to become of this Dead Sea if the precious crystal stream does not flow into it? Will God abandon our race to the devil? Would he have his church abandon her function of salting the earth? I do not believe it. I tell you there is to be a link made by almighty grace between the temple at Jerusalem and the very site of Sodom and Gomorrah: a silver stream is yet to traverse the space between the throne of the Most High and the foul Dead Sea: mercy is to triumph over judgment, and righteousness is to conquer sin. It shall yet be said on earth and sung in heaven, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!" Blessed be his name, that to the very chief of sinners this life-stream has flowed, and will continue to flow till time shall be no more! Who can diminish this flood? Not even he that glorieth to drink up Jordan at a draught. Who can divert it? It is not to be turned by the will of man. Who can destroy its saving force? Not even the Dead Sea itself shall be able to contend against the healing energy of this wondrous river. Let us begin to sing of the river whose streams make us glad. Let our spirits break out with exultation, for "*the waters shall be healed.*"

III. Thirdly, for a moment or two I want you to CONSIDER THE EFFICACY OF THE WATERS. I will quit the figure in some measure in order to explain how the gospel is adapted to heal the wickedness of men. "What does the gospel do?" saith one. I answer—In the gospel we set before men the horrible nature of sin, and thus we lead them to turn from it. He does not preach the gospel who fails to declare that sin slew the Son of God. The cross unveils the baseness and ingratitude of sin, and makes it to appear exceeding sinful. The gospel brings men to know the unchangeableness of the divine law, and that sin is the transgression of the law, and that every sin will have its just recompense of reward. There is no preaching the gospel unless you declare the terrors of the Lord. God hath winked at the times of man's ignorance, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent, for sin is not a thing to be played with, but a deadly enemy to be shaken off into the fire, as Paul shook off the viper from his hand. All this tendeth to the removal of human sin.

The gospel gives man a hope; and that is a grand thing for the degraded and self-condemned. To have a hope that you can be a better man is a great help in escaping from sin. To hope that you can be renewed, and become like the angels of God, though now you are like the devils in hell, is a great encouragement to turn to God. My gospel bids me go to the very vilest of the vile, and bid him hope. I count no man so loathsome that God may not look upon him in love. What a gospel this is, for hope is the beginning of amendment, the first letter of the alphabet of reform! Where there is no hope, the sinner gives the reins to his lusts, and thinks it wise to enjoy his sin while he may. O souls, this is gospel indeed to you, that there is forgiveness, forgiveness even for loud and crying sins!

The gospel purifies men because it gives them Christ himself to be their Saviour. It brings them the Son of God to be their salvation. It says, "Poor souls, you cannot help yourselves! Here is One on whom help has been laid, even a mighty One! Here is One that took your sin, and put it away. Here is One that will be a Friend to you in your worst times of need. Here is One that is bone of your bone,

and flesh of your flesh; lay your burdens down at his dear feet, for he has a fellow-feeling for you. Here is a Leader and Commander for you, who will lead you forth from the slavery of sin. Come, buckle on your harness to war against your sins, for he will give you power to overcome them." I tell you there is no gospel like a gospel that says, "Sinner, here is Christ for you!" Poor, wearied, burdened, heavy-laden sinner, take Christ to be yours, and you have all you want between this place and heaven!

Moreover, the gospel does not merely tell men certain truths, but it gives life, and power, and grace to them. There comes with the gospel a power almighty, which changes the nature of the man; touches his understanding, and enlightens it; touches his will, and changes it; touches his affections, and purifies them. This power is the Holy Ghost, equal and co-eternal with the Father and the Son—nothing less than very God of very God. This Holy Ghost goeth forth with the gospel, giving hearts of flesh, causing men to be born again, and creating all things new. The truth comes not in word only, but in the power of the Holy Ghost. The waters shall be healed by such a gospel, attended by such a power as this. I heard it said the other day, "We do not want more preachers, for the supply is more than equal to the demand." But then, the gospel creates its own demand. Wherever the gospel comes, it makes men thirsty for itself, it makes men hungry for itself, it does its own work without aid from any foregoing human preparedness. It does not even ask to be let alone: it will effect its purpose even though it be tampered with. Its own essential omnipotence secures its own preservation, enlargement, and success. How I marvel at those who quit the heavenly stream for their own little brooks and freshets! A certain divine has lately made a discovery, by which he is going to pour a flood of light upon the Bible. The Bible, it seems, has been a dark, mysterious Book to our forefathers: though martyrs died for it, and saints were comforted by it, yet these poor beings were in the dark for want of nineteenth century discoveries! At length the hour has come, and the man with it; a great genius has arisen, who has found light with which to illuminate the Bible. We used to sing

> "A glory gilds the sacred page,
> Majestic like the sun;
> It gives a light to every age,
> It gives, but borrows none."

Are we to alter our tune, and cheerfully accept the contributions of this uncommon person? I trow not. Did you ever hear of a madman who, with a vesta match, determined to show up the sun in the middle of the day? Come here, you that never saw the sun before! It is a dim affair, but we will strike this match, and then you shall see what you shall see! Brethren, this talk is all foolery: neither the scientists nor the divines can light up the Light of God. This Book is clear enough of itself, and this gospel is mighty enough of itself, without the aid of human wisdom. It will not be cleared, but clouded, by modern dotings upon evolution. The river of the gospel will force its own way despite modern thought: it will win and conquer, whoever may oppose.

The power of the gospel to cleanse this horrible Lake of Gomorrah

lies in this: that it touches the heart, it moves the affections, it changes the nature, it renews the entire man. Moreover, it binds men in a holy brotherhood, and leads them back to their Father, and their God. Its torrent bears away the pride which makes one man stand at a distance from his fellow; it drowns the oppression by which the great man thinks to trample down the poor. Its waves say as they flow, "All ye are brethren, and one is your Master, even Christ." Thus it works a holy revolution among men, and a restoration of the royal rights of Jesus. God send it, send it to us, to London, and to the entire world, and to his name shall be the praise!

IV. I must close by noticing, fourthly, THE LESSON OF THE WATERS. What is their voice to us to-day?

I think the first lesson is that *God works in very unexpected ways.* There is that Dead Sea. We look down upon it with horror. Can it ever be healed? It never would have occurred to you or to me that yonder temple, so pure and sacred, would have a spring welling up from under its threshold, so little and tiny that you might cover it with your hand at first, and yet out of that spring should come a sufficient purgation even for Sodom's sea. The Lord knows how to do his own work, and he does it by apparently slender means. "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Mark the little rill at Jerusalem, when the number of the men was about one hundred and twenty: that stream grew within a few days, till we read that "the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls"—till another day or so after we read, "And the number of the men was about five thousand." That small beginning most rapidly increased, is increasing, and will increase. The gospel has the same potency and force about it to-day that it has had in ages past. Always expect the unexpected; reckon that God has great things in reserve. He shot yon arrow, but his quiver is still full. He hath scarce begun the battle yet. Jehovah of Hosts hath stricken here a blow and there a blow, but behold he cometh forth to do greater execution by the sword of his strength! O great Prince, "ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things"! Come quickly, we pray thee.

What else ought we to learn? As the Dead Sea has to be cleansed by that stream of water, *all that we can do is, first of all, to pray.* Pray, "Spring up, O Well!" Pray that out of the midst of each of us may flow rivers of living water. Pray that God would work by his Spirit yet more abundantly. The Holy Ghost has descended: we do not need him to be poured out, but we would realize his power in another fashion: we would descend into the floods of his sacred influences: we beg of him to baptize us into his mighty waters, and sweep every sin away before him.

When we have done that, what next have we to do? Why, *begin fishing.* Wherever this stream rushes along, there will be fish: in this London there are fish now. Go and fish in the streets, fish in the street-corners, fish in any little room you can open, fish in the great crowds if they will come to you. The stream is breeding swarms of life; be ye fishers of men. God says to his church to-day, "I have much people in this city." Do not despair: God has an elect company in every parish

of London. Get to work by this sea, and stand there from En-gedi to En-eglaim, from Highgate to Norwood, from Stratford to Kensington, from one end of the city to the other. God help you to cast the net!

Above all, we must not come to be the marshes of which we read just now. Certain spots of land were overflowed by the river and the sea, but afterwards they were left high and dry as the stream retired; so that they were neither sea nor dry ground, but marshes. Beware of this! The most abominable beings out of hell are Christians without Christianity; and there are plenty of them. They have "a name to live, and are dead." They have no love to men, nor love to God, nor zeal for Christ's glory, and yet they talk of being Christians! Beware of high professors, who are unholy livers! These are jackdaws with peacocks' feathers stuck upon them; and they shall one day be stripped of all their plumes. These are not the children of the living God, but children of the devil. When they are brought before the Judge, to have their true parentage discovered, they shall be cut in sunder. So the great Solomon will ordain! Oh, that you and I may be true-born children of God! May we never be among those mongrels who are neither heathen nor Jews, neither Christians nor outsiders! May we be one thing or the other! Let us heed the voice of the prophet—"If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." All the blessing that ever comes from heaven will never save neutrals; for "the marishes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt." God deliver us from such a curse, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Genesis ii. 8—15; Ezekiel xlvii. 1—12; Revelation xxii. 1—15.

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A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 2ND, 1885, BEING THE DAY PREVIOUS TO THE GENERAL HOLIDAY, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And they compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross."—Mark xv. 21.

JOHN tells us that our Saviour went forth bearing his cross (John xix. 17). We are much indebted to John for inserting that fact. The other evangelists mention Simon the Cyrenian as bearing the cross of Christ; but John, who often fills up gaps which are left by the other three, tells us that Jesus set out to Calvary carrying his own cross. Our Lord Jesus came out from Pilate's palace laden with his cross, but he was so extremely emaciated and so greatly worn by the night of the bloody sweat, that the procession moved too slowly for the rough soldiers, and therefore they took the cross from their prisoner and laid it upon Simon; or possibly they laid the long end upon the shoulder of the strong countryman, while the Saviour still continued to bear in part his cross till he came to the place of doom. It is well that we should be told that the Saviour bore his cross; for if it had not been so, objectors would have had ground for disputation. I hear them say: You admit that one of the most prominent types, in the Old Testament, of the sacrifice of the Son of God, was Abraham's offering up his son Isaac; now, Abraham laid the wood upon Isaac his son, and not upon a servant. Should not therefore the Son of God bear the cross himself? Had not our Lord carried his cross, there would have been a flaw in his fulfilment of the type; therefore, the Saviour must bear the wood when he goes forth to be offered up as a sacrifice. One of the greatest of English preachers has well reminded us that the fulfilment of this type appeared to have been in eminent jeopardy, since, at the very first, our Lord's weakness must have been apparent, and the reason which led to the laying of the cross upon the Cyrenian might have prevented our Lord's carrying the cross at all. If the soldiers had a little earlier put the cross upon Simon, which they might very naturally have done, then the prophecy had not been fulfilled; but God has the minds

of men so entirely at his control, that even in the minutest circumstance he can order all things so as to complete the merest jots and tittles of the prophecy. Our Lord was made to be, in all points, an Isaac, and therefore we see him going forth bearing the wood of the burnt-offering. Thus you see that it was important that Jesus should for a while bear his own cross.

But it was equally instructive that some one else should be made a partaker of the burden; for it has always been part of the divine counsel that for the salvation of men from sin the Lord should be associated with his church. So far as atonement is concerned, the Lord hath trodden the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with him; but as far as the conversion of the world is concerned, and its rescue from the power of error and wickedness, Christ is not alone. We are workers together with God. We are ourselves to be in the hands of God part bearers of the sorrow and travail by which men are to be delivered from the bondage of sin and Satan, and brought into the liberty of truth and righteousness. Hence it became important that in the bearing of the cross, though not in the death upon it, there should be yoked with the Christ one who should follow close behind him. To bear the cross after Jesus is the office of the faithful. Simon the Cyrenian is the representative of the whole church of God, and of each believer in particular. Often had Jesus said, "Except a man take up his cross daily, and follow me, he cannot be my disciple"; and now at last he embodies that sermon in an actual person. The disciple must be as his Master: he that would follow the Crucified must himself bear the cross: this we see visibly set forth in Simon of Cyrene with the cross of Jesus laid upon his shoulder.

"Shall Simon bear the cross alone,
And all the rest go free?
No; there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me."

The lesson to each one of us is to take up our Lord's cross without delay, and go with him, without the camp, bearing his reproach. That many among this vast and mixed congregation may imitate Simon is the anxious desire of my heart. With holy expectancy I gaze upon this throng collected from all parts of the earth, and I long to find in it some who will take my Lord's yoke upon them this day.

I. I will begin with this first remark, that UNEXPECTED PERSONS ARE OFTEN CALLED TO CROSS-BEARING. Like Simon, they are impressed into the service of Christ. Our text says: "They compel one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross." Simon did not volunteer, but was forced into this work of cross-bearing. It would seem from another evangelist that he speedily yielded to the impressment, and lifted the burden heartily; but at first he was compelled. A rude authority was exercised by the guard; who being upon the Governor's business acted with high-handed rigour, and forced whomsoever they pleased to do their bidding. By the exercise of such irresponsible power they compelled a passing stranger to carry Christ's cross. It was specially singular that the man to have this honour was not Peter, nor James, nor John, nor any one of the many who had for years listened to the

Redeemer's speech; but it was a stranger from Northern Africa, who had been in no way connected with the life or teachings of Jesus of Nazareth.

Notice, first, that *he was an unknown man.* He was spoken of "as one Simon." Simon was a very common name among the Jews, almost as common as John in our own country. This man was just "one Simon"—an individual who need not be further described. But the providence of God had determined that this obscure individual, this certain man, or I might better say, this uncertain man, should be selected to the high office of cross-bearer to the Son of God. I have an impression upon my mind that there is "one Simon" here this morning, who has to bear Christ's cross from this time forward. I feel persuaded that I am right. That person is so far unknown that most probably he does not recognise a single individual in all this throng, neither does anybody in this assembly know anything of *him:* certainly the preacher does not. He is one John, one Thomas, or one William; or perhaps, in the feminine, she is one Mary, one Jane, one Maggie. Friend, nobody knows you save our Father who is in heaven, and he has appointed you to have fellowship with his Son. I shall roughly describe you as "one Simon," and leave the Holy Spirit to bring you into your place and service. But this "one Simon" was a very particular "*one* Simon." I lay the emphasis where there might seem to be no need of any: he was one whom God knew, and chose, and loved, and set apart for this special service. In a congregation like the present, there may be somebody whom our God intends to use for his glory during the rest of his life. That person sits in the pew and listens to what I am saying, and perhaps as yet he does not begin to enquire whether he is that "one Simon," that one person; and yet it is so, and ere this sermon is ended, he shall know that the call to bear the cross is for him. Many more unlikely things than this have happened in this house of prayer. I pray that many a man may go out from this house a different man from the man he was when he entered it an hour ago. That man Saul, that great persecutor of the church, afterwards became such a mighty preacher of the gospel that people exclaimed with wonder, "There is a strange alteration in this man." "Why," said one, "when I knew him he was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. He was as bigoted a man as ever wore a phylactery, and he hated Christ and Christians so intensely that he could never persecute the Church sufficiently." "Yes," replied another, "it was so; but he has had a strange twist. They say that he was going down to Damascus to hunt out the disciples, and something happened; we do not know exactly what it was, but evidently it gave him such a turn that he has never been himself since. In fact, he seems turned altogether upside down, and the current of his life is evidently reversed: he lives enthusiastically for that faith which once he destroyed." This speedy change happened to "one Saul of Tarsus." There were plenty of Sauls in Israel, but upon this one Saul electing love had looked in the counsels of eternity; for that Saul redeeming love had shed its heart's blood; and in that Saul effectual grace wrought mightily. Is there another Saul here to-day? The Lord grant that he may now cease to kick against the pricks, and may we soon hear of him, "Behold he prayeth." I feel convinced the counter-

part of that "one Simon" is in this house at this moment, and my prayer goes up to God, and I hope it is attended with the prayers of many thousands besides, that he may at once submit to the Lord Jesus.

It did not seem likely that Simon should bear the cross of Christ, for *he was a stranger who had newly come up from the country.* He probably knew little or nothing of what had been taking place in Jerusalem; for he had come from another continent. He was "one Simon a Cyrenian;" and I suppose that Cyrene could not have been less than eight hundred miles from Jerusalem. It was situated in what is now called Tripoli, in Northern Africa, in which place a colony of Jews had been formed long before. Very likely he had come in a Roman galley from Alexandria to Joppa, and there had been rowed through the surf, and landed in time to reach Jerusalem for the Passover. He had long wanted to come to Jerusalem; he had heard the fame of the temple and of the city of his fathers; and he had longed to see the great Assembly of the tribes, and the solemn Paschal feast. He had travelled all those miles, he had hardly yet got the motion of the ship out of his brain, and it had never entered into his head that he should be impressed by the Roman guard, and made to assist at an execution. It was a singular providence that he should come into the city at the moment of the turmoil about Jesus, and should have crossed the street just as the sad procession started on its way to Golgotha. He passed by neither too soon nor too late; he was on the spot as punctually as if he had made an appointment to be there; and yet, as men speak, it was all by mere chance. I cannot tell how many providences had worked together to bring him there at the nick of time, but so the Lord would have it, and so it came about. He, a man there in Cyrene, in Northern Africa, must at a certain date, at the tick of the clock, be at Jerusalem, in order that he might help to carry the cross up to Mount Calvary; *and he was there.* Ah! my dear friend, I do not know what providences have been at work to bring you here to-day; perhaps very strange ones. If a little something had occurred you had not taken this journey; it only needed a small dust to turn the scale, and you would have been hundreds of miles from this spot, in quite another scene from this. Why you are here you do not yet know, except that you have come to listen to the preacher, and join the throng. But God knoweth why he hath brought you here. I trust it will be read in the annals of the future:

> "Thus the eternal mandate ran,
> Almighty grace arrest that man."

God has brought you here, that on this spot, by the preaching of the gospel, you may be compelled to bear the cross of Jesus. I pray it may be so. "One Simon a Cyrenian, coming out of the country," is here after a long journey, and this day he will begin to live a higher and a better life.

Further, notice, *Simon had come for another purpose.* He had journeyed to Jerusalem with no thought of bearing the cross of Jesus. Probably Simon was a Jew far removed from the land of his fathers, and he had made a pilgrimage to the holy city to keep the passover. Every Jew loved to be present at Jerusalem at the Paschal feast. So, to put it roughly, it was

holiday-time; it was a time for making an excursion to the capital; it was a season for making a journey and going up to the great city which was "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth." Simon from far-off Cyrene must by all means keep the feast at Jerusalem. Mayhap he had saved his money for months, that he might pay his fare to Joppa; and he had counted down the gold freely for the joy which he had in going to the city of David, and the temple of his God.

He was come for the passover, and for that only; and he would be perfectly satisfied to go home when once the feast was over, and once he had partaken of the lamb with the tribes of Israel. Then he could say throughout the rest of his life, "I, too, was once at the great feast of our people, when we commemorated the coming up out of Egypt." Brethren, we propose one way, but God hath other propositions. We say, "I will step in and hear the preacher," but God means that the arrows of his grace shall stick fast in our hearts. Many and many a time with no desire for grace men have listened to the gospel, and the Lord has been found of them that sought him not. I heard of one who cared little for the sermon till the preacher chanced to use that word "eternity," and the hearer was taken prisoner by holy thoughts, and led to the Saviour's feet. Men have stepped into places of worship even with evil designs, and yet the purpose of grace has been accomplished; they came to scoff, but they remained to pray. Some have been cast by the providence of God into positions where they have met with Christian men, and a word of admonition has been blessed to them. A lady was one day at an evening party, and there met with Cæsar Malan, the famous divine of Geneva, who, in his usual manner, enquired of her whether she was a Christian. She was startled, surprised, and vexed, and made a short reply to the effect that it was not a question she cared to discuss; whereupon, Mr. Malan replied with great sweetness, that he would not persist in *speaking* of it, but he would pray that she might be led to give her heart to Christ, and become a useful worker for him. Within a fortnight she met the minister again, and asked him how she must come to Jesus. Mr. Malan's reply was, "Come to him just as you are." That lady gave herself up to Jesus: it was Charlotte Elliott, to whom we owe that precious hymn—

> "Just as I am—without one plea
> But that thy blood was shed for me,
> And that thou bidd'st me come to thee—
> O Lamb of God, I come."

It was a blessed thing for her that she was at that party, and that the servant of God from Geneva should have been there, and should have spoken to her so faithfully. Oh for many a repetition of the story "of one Simon a Cyrenian," coming, not with the intent to bear the cross, but with quite another mind, and yet being enlisted in the cross-bearing army of the Lord Jesus!

I would have you notice, once more, that this man was at this particular time not thinking upon the subject at all, for *he was at that time merely passing by.* He had come up to Jerusalem, and whatever occupied his mind he does not appear to have taken any notice of the trial of Jesus, or of the sad end of it. It is expressly said that he "passed by." He was not even sufficiently interested in the matter to stand in the crowd

and look at the mournful procession. Women were weeping there right bitterly—the daughters of Jerusalem to whom the Master said, "Weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children"; but this man passed by. He was anxious to hurry away from so unpleasant a sight, and to get up to the temple. He was quietly making his way through the crowd, eager to go about his business, and he must have been greatly surprised and distressed when a rough hand was laid upon him, and a stern voice said, "Shoulder that cross." There was no resisting a Roman centurion when he gave command, and so the countryman meekly submitted, wishing, no doubt, that he were back in Cyrene tilling the ground. He must needs stoop his shoulder and take up a new burden, and tread in the footsteps of the mysterious personage to whom the cross belonged. He was only passing by, and yet he was enlisted and impressed by the Romans, and, as I take it, impressed by the grace of God for life; for whereas Mark says he was the father of Alexander and Rufus, it would seem that his sons were well known to the Christian people to whom Mark was writing. If his son was the same Rufus that Paul mentions, then he calls her "his mother and mine"; and it would seem that Simon's wife and his sons became believers and partakers of the sufferings of Christ. His contact with the Lord in that strange compulsory way probably wrought out for him another and more spiritual contact which made him a true cross-bearer. O ye that pass by this day, draw nigh to Jesus! I have no wish to call your attention to myself, far from it; but I do ask your attention to my Lord. Though you only intended to slip into this tabernacle and slip out again, I pray that you may be arrested by a call from my Lord. I speak as my Lord's servant, and I would constrain you to come to him. Stand where you are a while, and let me beg you to yield to his love, which even now would cast the bands of a man around you. I would compel you, by my Lord's authority, to take up his cross and bear it after him. It would be strange, say you. Ay, so it might be, but it would be a glorious event. I remember Mr. Knill, speaking of his own conversion, used an expression which I should like to use concerning one of you. Here it is: "It was just a quarter past twelve, August 2nd, when twang went every harp in Paradise; for a sinner had repented." May it be so with you. Oh that every harp in Paradise may now ring out the high praises of sovereign grace, as you now yield yourself to the great Shepherd and Bishop of souls! May that divine impressment which is imaged in the text by the compulsion of the Roman soldier take place in your case at this very moment; and may it be seen in your instance that unexpected persons are often called to be cross-bearers!

II. My second observation is—CROSS-BEARING CAN STILL BE PRACTISED. Very briefly let me tell you in what ways the cross can still be carried.

First, and chiefly, *by your becoming a Christian.* If the cross shall take you up, you will take up the cross. Christ will be your hope, his death your trust, himself the object of your love. You never become a cross-bearer truly till you lay your burdens down at his feet who bore the cross and curse for you.

Next, you become a cross-bearer *when you make an open avowal of the*

Lord Jesus Christ. Do not deceive yourselves—this is expected of each one of you if you are to be saved. The promise as I read it in the New Testament is not to the believer alone, but to the believer who confesses his faith. "He that with his heart believeth and with his mouth maketh confession of him shall be saved." He saith, "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father; but he that denieth me"—and from the connection it should seem to mean, he that does not confess me—"him will I deny before my Father which is in heaven." To quote the inspired Scripture, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." There should be, there must be, the open avowal in Christ's own way of the secret faith which you have in him. Now this is often a cross. Many people would like to go to heaven by an underground railway; secrecy suits them. They do not want to cross the channel; the sea is too rough; but when there is a tunnel made they will go to the fair country. My good people, you are cowardly, and I must quote to you a text which ought to sting your cowardice out of you: "But the fearful and unbelieving shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone." I say no more, and make no personal applications; but, I beseech you, run no risks. Be afraid to be afraid. Be ashamed of being ashamed of Christ. Shame on that man who counts it any shame to say before assembled angels, and men, and devils, "I am a follower of Christ." May you who have hitherto been secret followers of the crucified Lord become manifest cross-bearers! Do you not even now cry out, "Set down my name, sir"?

Further, some have to take up their cross by *commencing Christian work.* You live in a village where there is no gospel preaching: preach yourself. You are in a backwoods town where the preaching is very far from being such as God approves of: begin to preach the truth yourself. "Alas!" say you, "I should make a fool of myself." Are you ashamed to be a fool for Christ? "Oh, but I should break down." Break down: it will do you good, and perhaps you may break somebody else down. There is no better preaching in the world than that of a man who breaks down under a sense of unworthiness: if that breakdown communicates itself to other people, it may begin a revival. If you are choked by your earnestness others may become earnest too. Do you still murmur, "But I should get the ill-will of everybody"? For Christ's sake could you not bear that? When the good monk said to Martin Luther, "Go thou home to thy cell and keep quiet," why did not Martin take the advice? Why, indeed? "It is very bad for young people to be so forward; you will do a great deal of mischief, therefore be quiet, you Martin. Who are you to interfere with the great authorities? Be holy for yourself, and don't trouble others. If you stir up a reformation thousands of good people will be burnt through you. Do be quiet." Bless God, Martin did not go home, and was not quiet, but went about his Master's business, and raised heaven and earth by his brave witness-bearing. Where are you, Martin, this morning? I pray God to call you out, and as you have confessed his name, and are his servant, I pray that he may make you bear public testimony for him, and tell out the saving power of the Saviour's precious blood. Come, Simon, I see you shrink; but the cross has to be carried; therefore bow your back. It is only a wooden

cross, after all, and not an iron one. You can bear it: you must bear it. God help you.

Perhaps, too, some brother may have to take up his cross by *bearing witness against the rampant sin which surrounds him.* "Leave all those dirty matters alone; do not say a word about them. Let the people go to the devil, or else you will soil your white kid gloves." Sirs, we will spoil our hands as well as our gloves, and we will risk our characters, if need be; but we will put down the devilry which now defiles London. Truly the flesh does shrink, and the purest part of our manhood shrinks with it, when we are compelled to bear open protest against sins which are done of men in secret. But, Simon, the Master may yet compel you to bear his cross in this respect, and if so, he will give you both courage and wisdom, and your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord.

Sometimes, however, the cross-bearing is of another and more quiet kind, and may be described as *submission to providence.* A young friend is saying, "For me to live at home I know to be my duty; but father is unkind, and the family generally impose upon me. I wish I could get away." Ah! dear sister, you must bear Christ's cross, and it may be the Lord would have you remain at home. Therefore bear the cross. A servant is saying, "I should like to be in a Christian family. I do not think I can stop where I am." Perhaps, good sister, the Lord has put you where you are to be a light in a dark place. All the lamps should not be in one street, or what will become of the courts and alleys? It is often the duty of a Christian man to say, "I shall stop where I am and fight this matter through. I mean by character and example, with kindness and courtesy and love, to win this place for Jesus." Of course the easy way is to turn monk and live quietly in a cloister, and serve God by doing nothing; or to turn nun and dwell in a convent, and expect to win the battle of life by running out of it. Is not this absurd? If you shut yourself away from this poor world, what is to become of it? You men and women that are Christians must stand up and stand out for Jesus where the providence of God has cast you: if your calling is not a sinful one, and if the temptations around you are not too great for you, you must "hold the fort" and never dream of surrender. If your lot is hard, look upon it as Christ's cross, and bow your back to the load. Your shoulder may be raw at first, but you will grow stronger before long, for as your day your strength shall be. "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth;" but it is good for a man to bear the cross in his old age as well as in his youth; in fact, we ought never to be quit of so blessed a burden. What wings are to a bird, and sails to a ship, that the cross becomes to a man's spirit when he fully consents to accept it as his life's beloved load. Truly did Jesus say, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Now, Simon, where are you? Shoulder the cross, man, in the name of God!

III. Thirdly, TO CROSS-BEARING THERE ARE NOBLE COMPULSIONS. Simon's compulsion was the rough hand of the Roman legionary, and the gruff voice in the Latin tongue, "Shoulder that cross;" but we hear gentler voices which compel us this day to take up Christ's cross.

The first compulsion is this—"*the love of Christ constraineth us.*" He has done all this for you; therefore by sweet but irresistible compulsion you are made to render him some return of love. Does not Jesus

appear to you in a vision as you sit in this house? Do you not see that thorn-crowned head, that visage crimsoned with the bloody sweat, those hands and feet pierced with the nails? Does he not say to you pointedly, "I did all this for thee; what hast thou done for me"? Startled in your seat, you cover your face, and inwardly reply, "I will answer that question by the rest of my life. I will be first and foremost a servant of Jesus: not a trader first and a Christian next, but a Christian first and a business man afterwards." You, my sister, must say, "I will live for Christ as a daughter, a wife, or a mother. I will live for my Lord; for he has given himself for me, and I am not my own, but bought with a price."

The true heart will feel a compulsion arising from a second reflection, namely, *the glory of a life spent for God and for his Christ.* What is the life of a man who toils in business, makes money, becomes rich, and dies? It winds up with a paragraph in the *Illustrated London News*, declaring that he died worth so much: the wretch was not worth anything himself; his estate had value, he had none. Had he been worth anything he would have sent his money about the world doing good; but as a worthless steward he laid his Master's stores in heaps to rot. The life of multitudes of men is self-seeking. It is ill for a man to live the life of swine. What a poor creature is the usual ordinary man! But a life spent for Jesus, though it involve cross-bearing, is noble, heroic, sublime. The mere earth-worm leads a dunghill life. A life of what is called pleasure is a mean, beggarly business. A life of keeping up respectability is utter slavery—as well be a horse in a pug-mill. A life wholly consecrated to Christ and his cross is life indeed; it is akin to the life of angels; ay, higher still, it is the life of God within the soul of man. O ye that have a spark of true nobility, seek to live lives worth living, worth remembering, worthy to be the commencement of eternal life before the throne of God.

Some of you ought to feel the cross coming upon your shoulders this morning when you think of *the needs of those among whom you live.* They are dying, perishing for lack of knowledge, rich and poor alike ignorant of Christ; multitudes of them wrapped up in self-righteousness. They are perishing, and those who ought to warn them are often dumb dogs that cannot bark. Do you not feel that you ought to deliver the sheep from the wolf? Have you no bowels of compassion? Are your hearts turned to steel? I am sure you cannot deny that the times demand of you earnest and forceful lives. No Christian man can now sit still without incurring awful guilt. Whether you live in London or in any other great town amidst reeking sin, or dwell in the country amidst the dense darkness which broods over many rural districts, you are under bonds to be up and doing. It may be a cross to you, but for Jesus' sake you must uplift it, and never lay it down till the Lord calls you home.

Some of you should bear the cross of Christ *because the cause of Christ is at a discount where you dwell.* I delight in a man in whom the lordlier chivalry has found a congenial home. He loves to espouse the cause of truth in the cloudy and dark day. He never counts heads, but weighs arguments. When he settles down in a town he never enquires, "Where is the most respectable congregation? Where shall I meet

with those who will advantage me in business?" No, he studies his conscience rather than his convenience. He hears one say, "There is a Nonconformist chapel, but it is down a back street. There is a Baptist church, but the members are nearly all poor, and no gentlefolk are among them. Even the evangelical church is down at the heel: the best families attend the high church." I say he hears this, and his heart is sick of such talk. He will go where the gospel is preached, and nowhere else. Fine architecture has scant charms for him, and grand music is no part of his religion: if these are substitutes for the gospel, he abhors them. It is meanness itself for a man to forsake the truth for the sake of respectability. Multitudes who ought to be found maintaining the good old cause are recreant to their convictions, if indeed they ever had any. For this cause the true man resolves to stick to truth through thick and thin, and not to forsake her because her adherents are poor and despised. If ever we might temporize, that time is past and gone. I arrest yonder man this morning, who has long been a Christian, but has concealed half his Christianity in order to be thought respectable, or to escape the penalties of faithfulness. Come out from those with whom you are numbered, but with whom you are not united in heart. Be brave enough to defend a good cause against all comers; for the day shall come when he shall have honour for his guerdon who accepted dishonour that he might be true to his God, his Bible, and his conscience. Blessed be he that can be loyal to his Lord, cost him what it may—loyal even in those matters which traitors call little things. We would compel that Simon the Cyrenian this day to bear the cross, because there are so few to bear it in these degenerate days.

Besides, I may say to some of you, you ought to bear the cross because you know you are not satisfied; *your hearts are not at rest.* You have prospered in worldly things, but you are not happy; you have good health, but you are not happy; you have loving friends, but you are not happy. There is but one way of getting rest to the heart, and that is, to come to Jesus. That is his word: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If after this you need a further rest for other and higher longings, then you must come again to the same Saviour, and hearken to his next word: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Some of you professors have not yet found perfect rest, and the reason is because you have looked to the cross for pardon, but you have never taken to cross-bearing as an occupation. You are hoping *in* Christ but not living *for* Christ. The finding of rest unto your soul will come to you in having something to do or to bear for Jesus. "Take my yoke upon you: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

There are many ways, then, of bearing the cross for Christ, and there are many reasons why some here present should begin at once to carry the load.

IV. To close: bear with me a minute or two while I say that CROSS-BEARING IS A BLESSED OCCUPATION. I feel sure that Simon found it so. Let me mention certain blessings which must have attended the

special service of Simon. First, *it brought him into Christ's company.* When they compelled him to bear his cross, he was brought close to Jesus. If it had not been for that compulsion he might have gone his way, or might have been lost in the crowd; but now he is in the inner circle, near to Jesus. For the first time in his life he saw that blessed form, and as he saw it I believe his heart was enamoured with it. As they lifted the cross on his shoulders he looked at that sacred Person, and saw a crown of thorns about his brow; and as he looked at his fellow-sufferer, he saw all down his cheeks the marks of bloody sweat, and black and blue bruises from cruel hands. As for those eyes, they looked him through and through! That face, that matchless face, he had never seen its like. Majesty was therein blended with misery, innocence with agony, and love with sorrow. He had never seen that countenance so well, nor marked the whole form of the Son of man so clearly if he had not been called to bear that cross. It is wonderful how much we see of Jesus when we suffer or labour for him. Believing souls, I pray that this day you may be so impressed into my Lord's service, that you may have nearer and dearer fellowship with him than in the past. If any man will do his will he shall know of the doctrine. They see Jesus best who carry his cross most.

Beside, *the cross held Simon in Christ's steps.* Do you catch it? If Jesus carried the front part of the cross and Simon followed behind, he was sure to put his feet down just where the Master's feet had been before. The cross is a wonderful implement for keeping us in the way of our Lord. As I was turning this subject over I was thinking how often I had felt a conscious contact between myself and my Lord when I have had to bear reproach for his sake; and how at the same time I have been led to watch my steps more carefully because of that very reproach. Brethren, we do not want to slip from under the cross. If we did so, we might slip away from our Lord and from holy walking. If we can keep our shoulder beneath that sacred load, and see our Lord a little on before, we shall be making the surest progress. This being near to Jesus is a blessed privilege, which is cheaply purchased at the price of cross-bearing. If you would see Jesus, bestir yourselves to work for him. Boldly avow him, cheerfully suffer for him, and then you shall see him, and then you shall learn to follow him step by step. O blessed cross, which holds us to Jesus and to his ways!

Then Simon had this honour, that *he was linked with Christ's work.* He could not put away sin, but he could assist weakness. Simon did not die on the cross to make expiation, but he did live under the cross to aid in the accomplishment of the divine purpose. You and I cannot interfere with Jesus in his passion, but we can share with him in his compassion; we cannot purchase liberty for the enslaved, but we can tell them of their emancipation. To have a finger in Christ's work is glory. I invite the man that seeks honour and immortality, to seek it thus. To have a share in the Redeemer's work is a more attractive thing than all the pomp and glitter of this world, and the kingdoms thereof. Where are the men of heavenly mind who will covet to be joined unto the Lord in this ministry? Let them step out and say, "Jesus, I my cross have taken. Henceforth I will follow thee. Come life or death, I will carry thy cross till thou shalt give me the crown."

While Simon was carrying the cross through the crowd, I doubt not that the rough soldiery would deal him many a kick or buffet; but I feel equally sure that the dear Master sometimes stole a glance at him. *Simon enjoyed Christ's smile.* I know the Lord so well, that I feel sure he must have done so: he would not forget the man who was his partner for the while. And oh, that look! How Simon must have treasured up the remembrance of it. "I never carried a load that was so light," says he, "as that which I carried that morning; for when the Blessed One smiled at me amidst his woes, I felt myself to be strong as Hercules." Alexander, his first-born, and that red-headed lad Rufus, when they grew up both felt it to be the honour of the family that their father carried the cross after Jesus. Rufus and Alexander had a patent of nobility in being the sons of such a man. Mark recorded the fact that Simon carried the cross, and that such and such persons were his sons. Methinks when the old man came to lie upon his death-bed he said: "My hope is in him whose cross I carried. Blessed burden! Lay me down in my grave. This body of mine cannot perish, for it bore the cross which Jesus carried, and which carried *him.* I shall rise again to see him in his glory, for his cross has pressed me, and his love will surely raise me." Happy are we if we can while yet we live be co-workers together with him, that when he cometh in his kingdom we may be partakers of his glory. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him." God bless you, and especially you who have come out of the country. God bless you. Amen and amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Mark xv. 1—38.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—122, 670, 660.

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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THE FOUNDATION AND ITS SEAL: A SERMON FOR THE TIMES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 9TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."—2 Tim. ii. 19.

PAUL had met with many difficulties in his earnest career, but his most painful trials came from false brethren. It is battle enough for the church to contend with the world, but what is she to do when she has to contend with herself? To go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, and in due time to reap it in the heat of the sun, is toil enough for the husbandman; but what is he to do when the tares are sown among the wheat, and they spring up and well-nigh choke the growing grain? He is distressed, and knows not what to do: at first he is eager to root up the tares; then he fears that he might root up the wheat with them; and so, at his Master's command, he lets both grow together until the harvest. This he does with tears in his eyes; for he foresees that those growing tares must do fearful mischief to the good seed, and in the end, where he looked for much, he will gather little. A compact army of brave spirits, every man in health, and every man a hero, can march across a continent and strike at the foe time after time, and every stroke shall fall as from the hammer of Thor. But if you have the leadership of a great and motley host, and there are many sick folk to be carried in the ambulances, while others are faint-hearted, cowardly, and cold in the cause, and yet another company are half suspected of a design to go over to the adversary; then the captain's hair may well turn grey in a night at the thought of what may be the result of a battle. Paul was full of somewhat similar anxieties when about to leave the field of conflict to receive his crown. He was handing over his commission of watchman of the churches to Timothy; and as he did so, it was with a trembling hand, as he thought of the evil influences which were at work within the church itself. Outside persecution seemed light enough to him, but internal dissension, heresy, and ungodliness weighed upon his spirit.

When I read this Second Epistle to Timothy, it reminds me somewhat, only it is a great improvement upon it, of David's addressing Solomon,

and reminding him of those who had given him trouble in his lifetime, and exhorting him how to deal wisely with them lest his kingdom should be disturbed by them. You notice that throughout the Epistle the apostle makes more mention of troublesome individuals than in any other letter. In the first chapter there is Phygellus and Hermogenes; and now we come upon Hymenæus and Philetus. These dogs generally hunt in couples. A little further on you get Demas, and Alexander the coppersmith, who had done much evil to the apostle. The departing saint, harbouring no resentment, yet has great anxiety of spirit as to what these mischief-makers might do with a young man like Timothy, since they had been such thorns in his own side.

It is a cheering thing to note that, while Paul mentions these things with a gracious anxiety, they do not disturb the serenity of his faith, nor make him question for a moment the success of the cause, nor doubt the success of the work which the Lord had wrought by his own hands. These are his words: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Courage, then, servant of God, whatever may be thy trials because of an apostatizing church; for thy faith will give thee victory. Be faithful to the word of the holy testimony, and the truth shall yet prevail. Live much in communion with thy Master; for by his name shalt thou triumph! Project thyself into the eternal future. Feel the crown already upon thy head when it is aching under many sorrows. Hear the Master's word, "Well done," when thou art weary with the noise of them that oppose the cross. Stand fast! Having done all, still stand! The campaign is not lost. Despite all that has happened, or ever shall happen, not one jot the less "the foundation of God standeth sure"; the work of God goes on, and the reward which God gives to the workers is not diminished, nor even placed in danger. Wherefore in patience possess thy soul.

This morning with deep solemnity of soul I approach this text, and pray that the Spirit of God may bless it to us all. I see in it three things: the first, perhaps, is rather in the context, it is *the lamentable overthrow* of which the apostle has been speaking. He says that these two men, Hymenæus and Philetus, overthrew the faith of some. Secondly, we shall survey *the abiding foundation*—"the foundation of God standeth sure;" and then, thirdly, *the instructive inscription* upon the foundation-stone, "The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

I. First, let us think for a little of THE LAMENTABLE OVERTHROW which the apostle so much deplored.

The apostle observed with sorrow *a general coldness*. It was in some respect coldness towards himself, but in reality it was a turning away from the simplicity of the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith. He says in the 15th verse of the previous chapter, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes," two men, I suppose, of whom he had hoped better things: perhaps persons who had professed a warm at-

tachment to his person. Their departure was the unkindest cut of all. A great want of spiritual life and zeal for the truth is our trial to-day. Laodicea is not the only church that is neither cold nor hot. I am at this moment unwillingly compelled to believe that a very serious blight is upon many of our churches. From a wide correspondence I gather that a wintry chill is just now upon the church: possibly it is not to such an extent as in certain terrible periods, but still to a very saddening degree. There is not that firmness in the faith, that holiness of life, and that enthusiasm for the cross of Christ that one would wish to see. I view the immediate prospect with serious anxiety. Yet, I was reading Mr. Bunyan's words concerning the age in which he lived, and I find that he had similar apprehensions in his time; and I notice that before his day each loyal-hearted man of God was troubled with similar fears. Nor were those fears childish: they were not a presumptuous trembling for the ark of the Lord, but a godly jealousy, lest the enemy should get an advantage over the hosts of God. It is a mercy that there should be somebody to complain; somebody to express the longing of the church for better things. I am sure that there is grave reason for regret at this moment. Though we look with the greatest gratitude upon all the things that are good, we still have to look with heavy hearts upon much that is grievous to the Spirit of God in the churches of the present day.

Furthermore the apostle saw with much alarm that *teachers were erring*. He names two especially, Hymenæus and Philetus, and he mentions the doctrine that they taught—not needlessly explaining it, but merely giving a hint at it. They taught, among other things, that the resurrection was past already. I suppose they had fallen into the manner of certain in our day, who spiritualize or rationalize everything. They say, "This is mythical. This death of Christ is to be understood as the triumph of self-sacrifice. This re urrection of Christ means the revival of forgotten principles." Thus they hold an atonement which is no atonement, and a resurrection which is no resurrection. They appear to accept the great historical fact, and yet they reduce it to fiction. This is the subtlety of the old serpent. Somehow or other these men manage to extract from the gospel an attractive philosophy; but it is not the gospel which God intended to be preached. They seek rather the wisdom of man's thought than the revelation of God's thoughts. You need not that I go into particulars, for all around us men are dealing craftily with the truth of God, adulterating it, and in heart denying it. These are by no means persons to be trifled with; many of them are keen, acute, and thoughtful; and it is the great peril of the church at this moment that she numbers such among her teachers. These can stab under the shield. We care not for the besiegers without, but we are distressed because of the traitors within. God grant that this thing may go no further, but may his people become alarmed by the growing decline of the church, and resolve to be rid of this destructive influence, which eats as doth a canker.

In Paul's day many *professors were apostatizing from the faith* because of the evil leaders. Sheep are such creatures to follow something that, when they do not follow the shepherd, they display great readiness to follow one another. When Hymenæus and Philetus taught a highly

intellectual doctrine, ever so many people, who fancied themselves to be cultured, must needs be of their mind. Hymenæus had discovered a method of being abreast of the times. so that the Christian teacher could figure in the heathen academy, and be complimented for his liberal views. These "cultured" teachers looked down with contempt upon those uncouth fishermen, who were so unlearned and ignorant as to believe that the teaching of Jesus meant what it said; for they, themselves, gave the gospel a more rational meaning. They thought themselves profound and eclectic, men who could see the soul of things, and therefore they rejected the simplicity of the cross, and put in its place the theories of the philosophers. They took away the foundation facts under the pretence of building higher, and thus the faith of many was overthrown. Take away the resurrection, and what remains of the gospel? The resurrection of Christ, and the consequent resurrection of his people, is the keystone of the arch of the Christian system; and if that be removed as a myth the whole building falls. The apostle saw numbers of persons led astray by this error; as, alas! we see many in these times deluded with kindred falsehoods. It becomes Christian men nowadays carefully to discriminate as to what they hear. I read the other day a complaint as to small towns having many chapels where one might have sufficed. Truly, one might suffice if the gospel were faithfully preached in it; but a score would not be enough if in them all there was an absence of the gospel of Jesus Christ and of the life and power of the Holy Ghost. When another gospel is introduced, those who love the truth of God are bound to enter their earnest protest, and to form another congregation. I am for unity in the life and truth of God, and for our coming closer and closer together—spiritual men to spiritual men; but that is quite another thing from making an aggregate of this great motley mass of Christian profession and unchristian teaching, since it hath so little of the true life of Christ within it. Would to God that in every place where Christ is preached professedly he were preached truthfully! Oh that you who profess to follow Christ were really doing so! But what is the chaff to the wheat? How much of chaff is mixed with every heap that lies upon our Lord's threshing-floor!

Paul also deplored that *ungodliness increased.* He says that the profane and vain babblings of his time increased unto more ungodliness. O brethren and sisters, it is godliness that we want—the living of the soul with God, and in God, and to God. We need a holy fear of God, a sacred sense of God, a true delight in God. We want less of man and more of God. Less of mere creed-repeating, and more of vital faith in God; less following of men, and more following of God in Christ Jesus. More of union with God, living in God, and likeness to God. Oh that he would work this in us! The world grows dark with accursed lust, and the Christian church grows more conformed to the ungodly world. Persecutions unto death have ceased; it is easy and respectable to bear the Christian name, and hence, the separation from the world, which is the glory of Christians, becomes less and less apparent. My heart is sore wounded with the sight of some who will come into God's house and undertake God's service during the Sabbath-day, and yet during the week they are unjust, oppressive, graceless, and greedy—not servants

of God, but servants of self and sin. By unholy professors the cross is dishonoured, the Holy Spirit is grieved, and Christ is put to an open shame. All this vexed the heart of the apostle in his day, and it is our cross and burden at this hour. "Lord have mercy upon us! Christ have mercy upon us!"

II. Now let us turn to the subject which supplied Paul with consolation. He speaks of the ABIDING FOUNDATION: "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure." It is a joy to quit the ever-moving flood for the firm, substantial rock. It is bliss to feel that there is something under your foot, something substantial, abiding, sure. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure. Though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof, yet will we not fear; for the Lord Jehovah changeth not.

What is this foundation which standeth sure? Those who have interpreted the passage have given many meanings to it, but I believe that all those meanings are really one. For the sake of clearness I would give three answers to the enquiry: the foundation is, secretly, the purpose of God; doctrinally, the truth of God; effectively, the church of God; in all, the system of God whereby he glorifies his grace. The foundation is *the divine purpose*. Though men prove fickle, false, and wicked, and the church is thereby sorely grieved, "nevertheless" God's purpose is carried out: the covenant of grace is fulfilled, and the glory of God is revealed. God has a grand design, from which he has never swerved, no, not by so much as a hair's breadth. His purpose shall stand: he will do all his pleasure. It is incumbent upon us to believe in the responsibility of men, and to feel the weight of that truth; for a truth it is of the most solemn importance. It is our duty to give ourselves up with all our might to the doing of that which is right, as if all things depended thereupon. Yet when we are baffled by matters which are beyond our control, it is a blessed thing to fall back upon the purpose and providence of the Almighty, and feel that though *we* are defeated, *he* cannot be. There is a power high over all which works for righteousness. The Messiah "shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law." The divine design in creation shall be effected; and in redemption and in providence it shall be the same. The Lord shall be at the last victor all along the line. The good shall glorify him, and even the evil shall be compelled to magnify the greatness of his majesty. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of isles be glad thereof." God himself, who is in very deed the foundation of all things, standeth sure.

The apostle also meant *the divine truth*, which is the foundation of the gospel. He had been speaking about certain truths which were spirited away by those two unworthies, Hymenæus and Philetus, and he says, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure." Interpreters have thought that Paul points at the doctrine of the resurrection. No doubt he does; but he includes every other doctrine which is a foundation truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yonder is a man who has proved that Jesus is not truly God. Let him prove what he likes,

since Jesus is God for all that. Another man has disproved the substitutionary atonement of Christ; let him disprove it if he pleases, for it is just as true. Rhetoric and logic can do wonders in appearance, but they do nothing in reality. The orator's thunder has not shaken the unchangeable truth of God. He is proud of his triumphs; but as we look into the Book and look into the dear Master's face, we feel that "nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure." No truth has ever been destroyed by all the fires through which it has passed. The fire which tried the bush in the wilderness was a much more potent element than any that men can kindle, for it was God's own presence, and he is emphatically "a consuming fire." Yet the bush was not consumed by such a fire; what, then, can destroy it? Even so, since the truth can stand the test of God the all-trying One, depend upon it, it can endure the test of such poor fires as man can bring to bear upon it. In a broad Scotch version I read, "The bush lowe'd and was nane the waur"; that is to say, "it was none the worse." Brethren, the gospel is n ne the worse for all the opposition which has surrounded it, though it has been as fierce as devouring flame. Only the additions of men have been burnt out of it. Everything that can be consumed ought to be consumed, and only that which cannot be burned is really God's eternal truth. All that has happened by all the controversy of all the ages, is that man's fiction has been separated from God's foundation, man's speculation has been purged out of God's revelation. The foundation of God st ndeth sure, and oh the joy of this fact to every heart that loves the Lord!

But, further, I think Paul meant here not only the purpose of God, and the truth of God, but *God's divine work* in the world in the salvation of his own. The divine election of God has been fulfilled so far; and those whom God has really saved, in whom there has been a real work of grace, stand sure when all others are overthrown. You look upon the church an l lament that so many have turned aside; that so many others are very poor specimens of Christians; that so many more are sadly questionable; and that a certain company are evidently false. Well, it is very sad; but yet there is a remnant according to the election of grace: "the foundation of God standeth sure." Those who were really laid upon the foundation by the Spirit of God, those who are vitally united to Christ, these still stand firm in faith and character. Those who are truly born of God live unto God; the righteous hold on their way; the choice spirits endure unto the end. Doth not Jesus say, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me"? Doth he not declare that, "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers"? The teachers of error would, if it were possible, have deceived the very elect; but the chosen detect the deception by the spiritual discernment which is in them, and by the teaching of the Holy Ghost. They love the truth, and live the truth, and the truth lives in them. Thus in their persons, "the foundation of God standeth sure." Brethren, let us take great joy in this foundation of God, this faithful church of God, which is steadfast and immovable in the day of blasphemy and rebuke. Blessed be the name of the Lord, he still has a quickened people; he still has a church in the world; in all communities of professing Christians there is a secret seed of

faithful ones; and while the floods and the winds have driven down the stream the many towering houses that were built upon the sand, yet the house of God still stands upon the rock. It is not yet complete so as to be fully built as the great house of God is to be; at the present it wears rather the aspect of a foundation, or basement, than of a house; but it will rise by degrees to be a fair palace, and even now the King himself deigns to dwell in it. What there is of the true church is a sure prophecy of what there shall be ere long. "The foundation of God standeth sure." Let us take courage from this and be not sorely moved nor dismayed in the day of apostasy. "They went out from us, but they were not of us." The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling." Let us not dwell upon the mournful side exclusively, lest we lose that joy of the Lord which is our strength. Our Master wept over Jerusalem once, but he also rejoiced in spirit when his mind looked another way. In his heart he always mourned over the woes of ungodly men, but still he thought and spake of more cheering themes; and so must we. It would not become us to let any one form of thought gimlet our hearts through and through with painful monotony. You can contemplate the sad side of things till you become so wretched as to be unable to do good. Have a brave and hopeful heart. When you see a black cloud, look for its silver lining. When you see that which looked like substantial material consumed in the fire, be thankful that if the wood and hay are gone the gold and silver remain. God is laying a foundation for the future, a foundation so sure that it cannot be moved, and he will build upon it course after course of jewelled stones till its walls, great and high, appear unto all men. Soon shall we see its windows of agate and its gates of carbuncle: soon shall the glittering pinnacles of "the terrible crystal" shine in the eternal light; and, best of all, we shall inhabit the house for ever, and go no more out; for the Lord God and the Lamb shall be the glory of that house, and his faithful ones shall be builded into it as living stones. Wherefore pluck up courage, and stand in your place, O ye who are trembling. "Onward!" be your watchword. Victory is not so far away as we fear. The retreat of yonder cowards is nothing; the turning back of the men of Ephraim is according to their nature: but be strong and quit yourselves like men; for the Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

III. Now, we are, in the third place, as we may be helped of the Holy Spirit, to look at this foundation and observe THE INSTRUCTIVE INSCRIPTION. I think this figure best expresses the apostle's intent; he represents the foundation-stone as bearing a writing upon it, like the stone mentioned by the prophet Zechariah, of which we read, "I will engrave the graving thereof, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." The custom of putting inscriptions upon foundation-stones is ancient and general. In the days of the Pharaohs, the royal cartouche was impressed upon each brick that was placed in buildings raised by royal authority. The structure was thus known to have been erected by a certain Pharaoh. Here we have the royal cartouche, or seal, of the King of kings set upon the foundation of the great palace of the church. The House of Wisdom bears on its forefront and foundation the seal of the Lord. The Jews were wont

to write texts of Scripture upon the door-posts of their houses; in this also we have an illustration of our text.

The Lord has set upon his purpose, his gospel, his truth, the double mark described in the text—the divine election and the divine sanctification. This seal is placed to declare that it belongs to the Lord alone, and to set it apart for his personal habitation. Doth not the Lord thus say, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it"? By his choice, and by his sanctifying grace, he has formed a people for himself, and they shall show forth his praise. The inscription, moreover, is put upon the foundation-stone, that every man may take heed how he buildeth thereupon. We cannot be sure when we build that every stone we place upon the foundation is well and truly laid there: "The Lord knoweth them that are his." But we have this mark to guide us—those who truly name the name of Christ depart from all iniquity. "By their fruits ye shall know them." We are to use judgment in our building, and this is the rule of it—we must look for holiness in every real convert; for "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." It is labour in vain to build those into the visible church who are not sanctified in the spirit of their minds. In doctrine also, it is in vain to preach unless our doctrine is according to godliness. A holy God will not dwell with an unholy people. If the foundation be holy, so must the building be. The seal upon the foundation is the mark of the builder and the indication of the object of that which is built. It is intended to denote the character of the entire edifice; for God's building is all of a piece, and of one nature throughout. On each individual Christian, who is truly so, there is the private seal of divine knowledge and the public seal of divine likeness. God knows and approves each true believer, and each true believer proves his knowledge of God and his delight in him by departing from iniquity. My inmost soul desires vehemently to aid in building up a church that shall be composed of men approved of God: God-fearing, God-loving men, in whom God lives, and who, therefore, live unto him. What a church this will be! Upon such a people will be seen the second mark, for they will hate all sin, and flee from it. They love that which is good, and true, and loving, and God-like. In us these two things must meet—God's free and sovereign grace towards us, and our hearty and practical obedience to his will, or else we are not his sealed ones, and are not built on his sealed foundation.

If I might use another illustration, I can suppose that when the stones for the temple were quarried in the mountains, each one received a special mark from Solomon's seal, marking it as a temple stone, and perhaps denoting its place in the sacred edifice. This would be like the first inscription, "The Lord knoweth them that are his." But the stone would not long lie in the quarry, it would be taken away from its fellows, after being marked for removal. Here is the transport mark in the second inscription: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." The first seal marked it for the Lord, the second secured its removal from the common stones around it. First comes election, and sanctification follows. I want every professing Christian to have that double mark, and so to be Christ's man, known of all to be such by coming out from the unclean, and being separated unto

the Lord. Remember the word of the prophet Isaiah: "Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."

Carefully follow me while I notice that the first mark is concerning God and us, and the second mark is concerning us and God.

The first is *concerning God and us.* "The Lord knoweth them that are his." He knows, that is, he foresees, and predestinates; for "whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate." Those that are his he always has known to be his, for they were his from before the foundation of the world. They are his known ones when he deals with them in grace, and comes into their hearts by his powerful operations. He watches over them by a special providence, knowing the way that they take, and never losing sight of them.

The text teaches us that the Lord discriminates: "The Lord knoweth them that are his." Some who bear his name are not his, and he knows them not. He will say of them at the last, "I never knew you." They are supposed to be his, they suppose themselves to be his, they are taken into his church as his, they continue throughout a long life nominally his; but they are discovered at the last. There is another and severer test than that of ministers, and elders, and church votes: the Lord discovers the secret things of the heart. Be not deceived, God is not mocked. There is an eye that has no failure in its vision, but sees to the very soul of things, and reads the hypocrite despite his pretended sanctity. This discernment on the part of God should make us walk very truthfully before him. Let none of us profess to be the Lord's unless we are such, nor ever pretend to an experience which we have not truly felt; for the Lord cannot be in any measure deceived: he searcheth the heart and trieth the reins of the children of men.

"The Lord knoweth them that are his," signifies that he is familiar with them, and communes with them. They that are really the Lord's property are also the Lord's company: he has intercourse with them. They know him, and he knows them. He makes himself known to them, and they make themselves known to him. O brothers, do you know God himself? Does God know you? Will he ever say, "I never knew you"! When I have been cast down I have said unto the Lord—"Lord, thou canst not say thou dost not know me, for I have knocked at thy door by the hour together; I have burdened thee with my needs, and haunted thee with my groanings. I have been thy daily beggar, receiving large alms at thy hands." It is a blessed thing to be sure that we are not unknown in heaven. At least we have the fellowship of asking and receiving, if no more.

Further, the words imply God's preservation of his own; for when God knows a man he approves him, and consequently preserves him. "The Lord knoweth them that are his," and he will keep such to the end. This man Hymenæus, and his fellow Philetus, may deceive many; but the Lord, who is the true Pastor of the church, will keep his own sheep according to his word—"I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." This is the first seal of the sure foundation. Be not afraid of it: "The Lord knoweth them that are his."

The second seal is *concerning us and God*—"Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." Observe how the practical always goes with the doctrinal in holy Scripture. Those whom free grace chooses, free grace cleanses. We are not chosen because we are holy, but chosen to be holy: and being chosen, the purpose is no dead letter, but we are made to seek after holiness. Note, that the word is universal as to the persons of believers: "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity." You expect ministers to be careful in their conduct, and so they should be; but are not their people under the same obligation? Elders and deacons are expected to be gracious. This, indeed, is as it should be; but why not those of whom they are the servants? Let every one that is called a Christian, or trusts Christ, or preaches Christ, or teaches Christ, flee far from the ways of unrighteousness.

This is a sweeping precept as to the thing to be avoided: let him "depart from iniquity"—not from this or that crime or folly, but from iniquity itself, from everything that is evil, from everything that is unrighteous or unholy. O ye Christian people, be holy, for Christ is holy. Do not pollute that holy name wherewith ye are named. O ye people of God, if you are indeed the Lord's, let no sin dwell with you. Do not say, "It is a constitutional sin." You are born again, what have you to do with the old constitution but to mortify it? Do not say, "Oh, but others do it." What have you to do with others?—to their own master they stand or fall. Depart from iniquity on your own account, even as Israel departed out of Egypt. Let your family life, your personal life, your business life be as holy as Christ, your Lord, would have it to be.

The text is very decisive—it does not say, "Let him put iniquity on one side," but, "Let him depart from it." Get away from evil. All your lives long travel further and further from it.

Do you know where my text originally came from? I believe it was taken from the Book of Numbers. Read in the sixteenth chapter the story of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. In the Septuagint almost the same words occur as those now before us. Moses and Aaron were the servants of God, and they were, so to speak, the foundation of the building of the Jewish Commonwealth. Moses was faithful in all his house. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled, and sought to overthrow that foundation, and Moses replied to them, "The Lord will show who are his, and who are holy; and will cause him to come near unto him; even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near to him." So he bids them come and bring their censers, and officiate as priests, if they dare to do so. There they stand, and there stands Aaron, and the Lord knoweth and showeth who are his. Now, turn to the twenty-sixth verse of the same chapter, and read, "Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins." Then the faithful fled away from their tents on every side, and, before long, the ground clave asunder that was under them, and the earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up. What a parallel is the whole chapter with my text! And what a warning to all who teach false doctrine within the church of God! Judgment will surely overtake them. The Lord shall "gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into

a furnace of fire." The Lord Jesus is exercising discipline in his church every day. It is no trifling matter to be a church member, and no small business to be a preacher of the gospel. If you name the name of Christ, you will either be settled in him or driven from him. There is continually going on an establishment of living stones upon the foundation, and a separating from it of the rubbish which gathers thereon. Come to Christ, we say, and oh that you would come; but still do not come to him pretendedly and nominally; for "his fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor." To and fro goes that great winnowing fan, and every breath of the wind drives away chaff that looked like wheat. Who could tell by sight what it was? The good grain falls to the ground, but lo, the chaff is blown away! Yonder fire that is burning outside the threshing-floor destroys it. Judgment must begin at the house of God. The Lord may let the wicked remain in this world for many a day unpunished; but if you come near to him he will be sanctified in you, or upon you. There is discipline within my Master's house, and if you come under his roof you must come under that discipline. For this cause in olden times many were sick in the churches, and many died prematurely; and it is so still, for within his great house a jealous God maintains a strict rule. Thus saith the Lord, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities." See how he dealt with Ananias and Sapphira within the church, while many a liar outside of it grows grey in falsehood. Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord because they offered strange fire, while many another man has lived on in the blackest iniquities. For Achan's sin the whole nation of Israel was sorely troubled. What a solemn thing is iniquity in the church of God!

Brethren, I conclude with a brief but earnest appeal. Let us seek after the highest degree of holiness. Let us not be satisfied with being nominal Christians; let us aim at the greatest measure of godliness. Let us plunge into the stream of grace, immersing ourselves wholly into the life of God. How many professors appear to know nothing of the real force and energy of the Spirit of God in subduing sin and creating holiness! Theirs is a shallow life. Alas, how much they lose! They come under the obligations of the house of God, but they do not know the infinite privileges of that house. It is for the truly spiritual that God reserves the choicest of his dainties. Be half a Christian, and you shall have enough religion to make you miserable; be wholly a Christian, and your joy shall be full. Walk with God in the light as he is in the light, and you shall have fellowship with him, such as shall make earth akin to heaven. Take a little light and a little darkness, and attempt to make a mixture of them; seek to join the church and the world, and you shall have neither the pleasures of the world nor the comforts of the Spirit. It is a pity for a man to miss joys which an angel might covet!

What an injury such professors are to the church! Each one pulls his fellows up or drags them down. Every man in the church is either a help or a hindrance. No Christian man can live to himself. He may attempt to confine himself within his own ribs, and button up his coat, and fancy that what he does is to himself alone, and that his tongue and his heart are his own; but it is not so. An aroma steals forth from

every man's life, and it is either like the spikenard of the alabaster box, or like the reeking of a dung-hill. God help us to remember our influence upon others.

Think also how much the world is injured by Christians who are not Christians! Oh, friends, we want nowadays a sterling Christianity. We cannot do with German silver now: we must have the real metal. I was about to say I would sooner you had no religion, and made no pretence to having any, than to have the imitation of it. Sin is real to-day. We have heard enough of how far sinners will go; they venture not only to the brink of hell, but they snatch the accursed fire out of the pit itself, and bring it into our city. Shall saints be shams, when sinners are so real? Shall Baal have worshippers that cut themselves with knives and leap upon his altar in the frenzy of their lust; and shall Jehovah have only a faithless company who as yet are halting between two opinions, and do not know whether he is God or not. Oh for a church of God that shall shake itself loose from the world! If we had but once such a church, there were hope for our age. God send it!

Last of all, how is Christ shamed and dishonoured when we are not holy, but worldly, covetous, proud, and unloving! Oh, sirs, it seems to me that since the foundation of God was laid in agony and bloody sweat, and since God himself became incarnate that he might lay the foundation of holiness in the world, we ought to take heed how and what we build thereon. We must come to it, for "other foundation can no man lay"; but it behoves us to come very solemnly to it, and to know what we mean by building thereon. True godliness is not to say, "I believe," but to believe; not to talk of repentance, but to repent; it is not to speak of regeneration, but to be born again; it is not to talk about consecration, but really to live to God; it is not to speak about the Holy Ghost, but to have him dwelling in you. Be it ours to have truth in the inward parts and grace in the core of the heart. Oh, may God bring us to this! We ask it for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

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A Sermon

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C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."—1 John iii. 21.

CAREFULLY observe that this text is spoken to the people of God. It speaks to those who are called "beloved." These are the people who are specially loved of God and of his people. It is a very sweet and endearing title, but it evidently in this case belongs only to those who are of the family of grace: these alone can remain uncondemned of their hearts, and live in confidence towards God. I want you to observe this, because there are different ways of addressing different people, and these ways are instructive. To those who are not yet numbered among the beloved, we preach the gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It is a gospel intended for the sinful, and it talks to them of pardon bought with blood: it is a gospel intended for the ungodly and it speaks to them of the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby their ungodly hearts may be renewed. Its tale is altogether of grace and free favour, and the passing-by of transgression, iniquity, and sin to all those who cast themselves believingly at Jesus' feet. That is the voice of Scripture to those who as yet are not beloved. The hope is that the Lord will call them beloved who were not beloved, and that in the place where it was said, "They are not my people," they shall be called the people of the living God. But when we come to speak to those who are saved, to those who are the beloved of God, we deal not with the pardon of criminals, but with the conduct of children. They are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation; and therefore we do not so much urge them to saving faith as to the higher degree of boldness which grows out of faith, to that confidence towards God which is the right and privilege of the heirs of salvation. We want them not only to know that they have believed, but to be assured of it; and to enjoy that holy familiarity with God, that blessed boldness towards God, that sweet joy and restfulness of spirit which are their privilege as the beloved of the Lord. These enjoyments may be had by them if they will be

obedient to the directions of the Spirit of God, which are laid down by the beloved apostle in this epistle.

As soon as we become children we are freed from the condemning power of the law; we are not under the principle and motive of the law of works, but yet we are not without law unto Christ. We come under those sacred regulations which rule the household of God. We are dealt with not as mere subjects are ruled by a king, but as children are governed by a father. We come from under that law which was promulgated with thunders and lightnings, and the sound of a trumpet waxing exceeding loud and long, and we listen to the gentle voice of the man Christ Jesus. We come from under that law which did not permit even a beast to touch the mountain, but kept all Israel at a distance by bounds set about the mount; and we draw dear with glad hearts unto the Lord. We come, I say, from under the law, and we feel the sway of love. "Ye are not under the law, but under grace," and, therefore, sin shall not have dominion over you. We have come into the family of God, and in that family there is a rule and discipline devised by love, and carried out with infinite compassion. Upon our obedience to that discipline our peace and prosperity depend. If we so live that our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.

It appears from the text that this child-like confidence towards God originally arises out of a certain solemn trial of our case. There is to be a trial within the heart, or conscience, a trial in which every power of the inner nature is to take its part as prosecutor, witness, jury, or judge. Out of this trial comes the non-condemnation which gives birth to "confidence toward God." At this time I shall bring before you, first, *the trial in the inward court of the heart;* secondly, *the acquittal pronounced by this court,* "If our heart condemn us not"; and thirdly, the result, *the confidence which comes of this acquittal;* "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." May the Holy Spirit teach us while we think on these things!

I. I want you to think of THE TRIAL HELD IN THE INNER COURT OF MAN'S NATURE, within his heart. It is a sort of petty sessions, not the Great Assize. Conscience sits within us, as judges sometimes sit in chambers, hearing cases, as they say, *in camera.* If we be righteously acquitted in this first court, then the matter is ended, and we have confidence toward God; but if our heart condemn us, if in this preliminary trial we are condemned, it is an evil omen; for the probability is that the great all-knowing Judge will more than confirm the sentence. Condemnation by our own conscience is an ill sign, though even yet there is a court of appeal. If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

I will now speak upon this trial under the heads of certain observations.

This trial is studiously avoided by very many. Many professors shun anything like a testing of their profession, any trying of their religion by examination. Multitudes of persons seldom think; they live the life of butterflies, flitting from flower to flower with careless wing; there is no real purpose in their lives. Many others think, and think deeply, but not about their souls or their God. They consider the matter of their relationship to their Creator to be a very secondary matter, which can be taken up in the last few minutes of their lives, when the death

sweat is on their brow and they are quite incapable of proper judgment. They leave, I say, the best things to the worst moments, and think that they are wise in so doing. This is a grave folly, and ought not to rule a man in his senses. Certain Christian professors, too, who should know better, seldom examine themselves as to whether they are in the faith. They take it for granted that all is well with them. They made a profession a great many years ago; they have been decent sort of people ever since; in fact, they have been respected among their fellow Christians, possibly they have even taken office in the church. Are they to question their foundation? Is it necessary that they should put themselves into the scales and be weighed again? It is a very ominous sign for a man when he is afraid of discussing his spiritual state in the chamber of his own heart. I am persuaded that many Christians are the subjects of doubts and fears about their own condition, simply because they have never had the matter out. It is a great deal better to sift an affair to the bottom than it is to be always tormented by suspicion. If I must go to sea, and I suspect the soundness of the vessel, I shall demand that the ship be surveyed, and that I know whether it is a rotten old coffin, or whether it is a good substantial ship. I do not think it is a healthy state of things for man to be always singing—

"'Tis a point I long to know."

Brother, you ought to know whether you love the Lord or no. Your love must be very cold and feeble if it be a matter of question. Warmth of love proves its own existence in many ways. Friend, you should be anxious to the last degree to take stock of your spiritual estate. Your desire should be to know the very worst of your case. If your condition should turn out to be horribly bad, you had better know it: certainly your knowing it will not make it any worse. If your case should turn out to be all right, then you will have the confidence that comes of this knowledge—the confidence of which our text speaks. If our hearts, after due, deliberate, and impartial trial, condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God, and that confidence sweetens life. He that gets confidence through honest searching of heart shall be filled with delight and strength. But, I repeat it sadly, many avoid the inward trial of the heart; they will not bring their case into the spiritual court, even though the judgment-seat be set up in the privacy of their own inward nature. Thus they walk on blindfold to the brink of the precipice. God grant the bandage may be taken off before they have taken the final and fatal step.

But, secondly, let us note that *genuine Christians very much frequent this court of conscience.* They long to have their condition put to a thorough test, lest they be deceived. I have known some Christians even keep too much in this court: they so often test themselves that it looks as if they would spend their lives in making trials of their state. Looking within can be easily overdone; we ought to have higher work than that of continually laying the foundation of repentance from dead works. When a ship first leaves the stocks it is well for it to go a trial trip, but to have a ship always being tried would be very absurd; it is time that it took voyages in real earnest, and was registered in the merchant service; there will then be trial enough in

the actual execution of service. Some Christians, by a continual introspection, are always raising the point, "Am I a Christian?" Brother, be a Christian. "Am I a child of God?" Brother, be a child of God, and enjoy it; and do not spend a lifetime in searching for the family register. However, it is certain that the genuine Christian is not averse to self-examination, nor to any form of test through which he can be put. If you are right with God your prayer will be, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." "O my God, I do not wish to be deluded with 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace; I do not want to deceive myself, or to be lulled into soft slumbers upon the dainty bed of presumption. No, let me be emptied from vessel to vessel rather than be suffered to settle upon my lees. Let me be searched with candles rather than harbour sin within me. Let me even be thrust into the fire rather than remain base metal, the counterfeit of the King's money." Make sure work for eternity. Be certain, by the witness of the Holy Ghost within you, that you are indeed the children of God. The spirit of the true man answers to this: he is always willing to set in order the court of conscience, and make solemn trial of his heart and life.

In this court, dear friends, *the question to be decided is a very weighty one.* What is that question, do you think? I do not think it is the question, "Am I perfect?" because we can solve that without holding a formal court. The question is not, "Am I absolutely free from sin?" for, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." The question is this, "Am I sincere in the truth? Is my religion true, and am I true in my profession of it?" Next, "Does love rule in my nature?" All this chapter deals with love, and teaches us that the possession of love is the supreme test of our state. Note the fourteenth verse: "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." The enquiry is,—"Do I love God? Do I love my brother also? Is my spirit that of love; for, if not, I am not a child of God?" Then the next question is, "Do I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?" In the verse which succeeds my text this is put as a great test, that we believe in Jesus Christ. Faith is the main question for conscience to decide, together with the following one, "Do I also keep his commandments? Do I obey God? Do I seek to be holy as Jesus is holy? Or am I living in known sin, and tolerating that in myself which does not and cannot please God?" The verse that follows my text puts it, "We keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight"; and the question is, "Do we not only try to keep the commandments, but do we do so because it is pleasing to God? Is it my master-motive to please God? Do I want to be an Enoch, who had this testimony, that he pleased God? Do I keep his commandments, and labour to please him?" These are the questions to be tried in the court of conscience, and never was there a weightier issue. On this our eternal state depends. It is not your estate that is now at stake; it is not your health that is now in question, it is your living unto God, your being now a child of God, and so being prepared to face the mysterious

solemnities of eternity. O sirs, do not hesitate to take these matters into the court of conscience. If you have avoided that court before, attend it now, and give your soul a solemn hearing!

This court is guided by a mass of evidence. That evidence has not to be sought for, it is there already. If the case were to be, "Do my fellow-men think me a child of God; do they regard me as being a believer in whom faith works by love?" that would be a difficult question, because we should have to subpœna so many to give their opinion of our private and public life. But in this case we have nothing to do with outsiders; the conscience is the witness as well as the judge and jury. The whole case is carried on within. We cannot demur to the witnesses, for they are our own heart and conscience. We must believe what these say. Nor can we demur to the judgment, since our own conscience is judge, and we are not at all likely to be unjust towards ourselves. We are so partial, and there is so much of flattering deceit and self-love about us, that we could not wish to be tried by a more favouring judge than our own conscience. We cannot decline the jurisdiction under any pretence of prejudice against us. And, oh, what a mass of evidence our heart can furnish, evidence even more conclusive than that of outward actions! Memory rises up and says, "I remember all thou hast done since thy profession of conversion,—thy shortcomings and breaches of covenant." The will confesses to offences which never ripened into acts for want of opportunity. The passions own to outbreaks which were concealed from human observation. The imagination is made to bear testimony, and what a sinful power that imagination is, and how difficult it is to govern it: its tale is sad to hear. Our tempers confess to evil anger, our lusts to evil longings, our hearts to evil covetousness, pride, and rebellion. Hopeful witness there is also of sin conquered, habits broken, and desires repressed: all this is honestly taken in evidence and duly weighed. Everything within us will have to tell whether it has been renewed or not, whether it has been changed from darkness to light, and come from under the power of sin and Satan into the power of Christ. Each power can give evidence of grace or token of unregeneracy, and according to the weight of evidence the verdict must go. The heart possesses a mass of evidence utterly unknown anywhere else, for the heart knows its own sinfulness as it knows its own bitterness, and the man's heart can reveal secrets to itself which it dare not whisper into the ear of the kindest friend. The trial cannot fail from want of evidence bearing upon the point.

While the trial is going on, *the deliberation causes great suspense.* As long as I have to ask my heart, "Heart, dost thou condemn me, or dost thou acquit me?" I stand trembling. You may have seen a picture entitled, "Waiting for the Verdict." The artist has put into the countenances of the waiters every form of unrest, for the suspense is terrible. Blessed be God, we are not called upon to wait long for the verdict of conscience. We ought never to let the question remain in suspense at all: we should settle it, and settle it in the light of God, and then walk in the light as God is in the light. I confess I cannot understand the comfort which I see in some people's faces when they own that they do not know whether they are the people of God or not. If you are not saved, or are not sure of it, how dare you rest? Are

you in danger of eternal wrath? Then give no sleep to your eyes till you know that you have escaped so great a peril. It looks to me as if your doubt could not be real if it does not work in your heart great misery and agony of spirit. A person in doubt about his salvation, and unable to rest, I can perfectly well understand; but a person in doubt in any measure about his reconciliation to God, and yet happy, is a mystery. How can the grace of God be in a heart which is not sure of pardon and yet is content? It is an exceedingly painful thing to have this trial going on in the soul and to be waiting for the verdict.

One thing I will observe, however, before I leave this matter: *it is not the supreme court.* If it should so happen that the verdict of the court should be against you, if your heart condemn you, remember the verdict is not final; there is still a higher court. I love the way in which Peter put it once. He had denied his Master, denied him repeatedly with oaths, but he had bitterly repented; and when his Lord said to him, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" his heart did not condemn him upon the question of loving his Master; but his heart did condemn him sorely for having denied his Lord; so, after pleading, "Lord, I do love thee," he takes his case into the higher court, and says, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." In moments of soul-conflict it will be wise for you to carry this question beyond yourself up to the Omniscient One. The translation of the Revised Version, though I do not like it, has a bearing on this point, and so I quote it: "Hereby shall we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before him, whereinsoever our heart condemn us; because God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

I pray you all to recollect this, that the trial by your conscience is not, after all, the ultimate and the decisive one; because your conscience may go to sleep, or make a mistake in your favour; or your conscience may become morbid, and may not take under its consideration all the facts of the case, and so may go against you. Since there may be an error of judgment you should make your appeal to the Most High, saying, "Search me, O God." Above all, if your conscience should now condemn you, still remember that there remaineth the free, full gospel even for the chief of sinners. If you stand before God condemned in heart this morning, throw yourself upon your face with that sense of condemnation upon you, and cry, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Whichever verdict comes from an enlightened conscience, it will be exceedingly serviceable to you if you have regard to it. If it condemn you not, then have you confidence toward God; and if it condemn you, the condemnation may drive you at once to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before the guilty in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. May the Holy Spirit thus bless you!

II. Allow me, secondly, to speak to you upon a pleasing theme, namely, THE ACQUITTAL ISSUED FROM THIS COURT: "If our heart condemn us not." Observe, that a man may get an acquittal from the court of conscience; for *the question laid before the heart can be settled.* It can be ascertained whether I sincerely believe in Jesus Christ; it can be ascertained whether I sincerely love God and love his people; it can be ascertained whether my heart is obedient to the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are not hazy, mysterious problems,

which can never be solved. The case may be made clear one way or the other. The court has no difficulty before it beyond its faculty; it is quite competent to decide the question in the light of Scripture by the help of God.

These questions, however, must be debated with great discernment. Suppose a person to be greatly tempted, to be tempted morning, noon, and night with foul temptations, yet conscience must not say, "This person is no child of God, because he is tempted." There is no sin in being tempted, since our Lord Jesus was tempted of the devil, and yet in him was no sin. Abundance, aye, superabundance, of temptation is no proof against the sincerity of our faith in our God; on the contrary, it may sometimes happen that the more we are tempted the more true is it that there is something in us to tempt, some good thing which Satan seeks to destroy.

Again, *the verdict of the heart must be given with discrimination,* or otherwise we may judge according to outward circumstances, and so judge amiss. It will never do to say, "I am greatly afflicted in estate, in family, or in depression of spirits, and therefore I cannot be a child of God." What! are not God's children chastened? What son is there whom the Father chasteneth not? Some of the best children of God have been the most afflicted; aye, and let me say it pointedly, some of the purest Christians that have ever lived have had the most sickness to bear, and by that means they have been made more meet for heaven, even as the sycamore fig by being bruised becomes ripe. When, therefore, it is suggested that you are not a child of God because you are afflicted, the idea is not to be tolerated, since we are born to trouble as the sparks fly upward.

Neither, again, do our imperfections or infirmities decide against us. An enlightened conscience saith, "It is true this man hath sinned, but it was not of intent, but by inadvertence or surprise. His soul hates the sin into which he fell; he deeply repents of his offence." The occurrence of sin in the life does not prove a man to be out of grace. The prevalence of sin, the toleration of sin, the love of sin, the wilful continuance in sin, would do so; but the fact of imperfection, if wept over and repented of, is not condemnatory evidence. The fact that my child is little and feeble is no proof that he is not my son. The boy may be like his father, and yet be only a tiny babe. Weakness and even faultiness may be confessed, and yet we may have confidence towards God. So the verdict has to be given with great discrimination.

And *the verdict has to be given, mark you, upon gospel principles.* The question before the court of conscience is not, "Have I perfectly kept the law?" The answer to that is simple enough: "There is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not"; "by the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified." The question is, "Am I a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I resting in him for salvation, and do I prove the truth of that faith by loving God, and loving the brethren, and by doing those things which are pleasing to God, and avoiding those things which are displeasing to him?" The question is not concerning merit, but concerning grace and the fruit of grace. Salvation is of grace, and of grace alone; therefore my enquiry should be,—"Am I partaker of that grace? Unworthy though I be,

am I washed in the blood of Jesus; am I covered with his righteousness; am I accepted in the Beloved?" That is the question, and if ever you get discussing it upon legal principles you will go wrong. We are not tried in the court of the heart according to the old covenant, but according to the new covenant: another book is opened, which is the book of life.

Permit me to say here that *this question in the court of the heart must never be settled by our feelings.* If the heart be at all right in its judgments it will never say, "I am a child of God because I am so happy;' nor will it exclaim, on the other hand, "I cannot be a child of God because I am so sad." Holy feelings may be brought in as evidence, but they are hard to estimate. Feelings are variable as the wind; feelings depend so much upon the bodily and outward surroundings, so much even upon the condition of the atmosphere. I protest that as to feelings I go up and down very much according to the weather-glass. Therefore I make small account of my feelings. If I am very glad I say to myself, "Keep steady. Be not intoxicated with joy." If I find my spirits sink, I cry, "Come, heart, do not play the fool; you have nothing to be down about: rejoice in God always, and have no confidence in the flesh." Deal thus with yourselves, for the question in hand is not, "Am I happy?" but, "Am I a sincere believer, and does my faith prove its sincerity by the effect which it produces upon my life?" Sinners can rejoice as well as saints, and saints can mourn as well as sinners; the point is not what we feel, but what we believe and do.

The question of our state ought to be settled speedily. As I have already said to you, it must not be allowed to hang about. We know "the law's delays," but we must not allow any delay in this court. No, we must press for summary justice. Does my heart condemn me, or does not my heart condemn me? Get a clear and plain answer at once to this issue. If your heart condemns any of you here this morning, if you say, "Yes, I am a member of the church but I ought not to be, I do not live as I should"; if you are not believers in Christ; if you feel that you have no love to the brethren, then take the verdict, and go humbly to God and ask him to renew your hearts. The door of free grace is still open to you. But, on the other hand, if your conscience says, "Yes, with all my imperfections, with all my infirmities, I do love God with all my heart; I do trust in Christ, for I have nothing else to trust to; I do lean my whole weight upon his finished work; I hang on Christ as a vessel hangs on the nail; I have no dependence anywhere else. I know there is a change in me; I know that the things I once loved I now hate, and the things I once hated I now love; I desire to perfect holiness in the fear of God"; then you are in the condition of which the apostle says, "If our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

Let us consider that happy state at some length, and then close our discourse. May you all have the full enjoyment of holy boldness before God through the operation of the Holy Ghost.

III. Let us consider THE CONSEQUENCE OF THIS ACQUITTAL. Here is the man who has had his acquittal in the court of conscience. Your conscience has said, "He is a sincere man; he is a believing man; he is quickened with the life of God; he is an obedient and Godfearing man";

and now you have confidence toward God; or at least you have a right to such confidence.

What does that confidence or boldness mean? There is the confidence of *truthfulness*. When you kneel down to pray, you know that you are praying, and not mocking God; when you sing, you are making melody in your heart; when you preach, you are preaching that which your soul believes. If I spoke to you to-day about things which I was not quite sure of, it would be wretched work; but I usually feel a great deal of enjoyment when I am preaching, because to me the things which I teach are my comfort and life. If *you* do not enjoy the sermon, I do. Sometimes I say to myself, "These doctrines are exceedingly sweet: I feed upon them myself, and therefore the people ought to be fed; and if they are not it is their own fault." A cook may not even get a taste of the joint; but it is not often so with me. Because I believe for myself I feel a confidence in preaching to you. Confidence towards God is a truthfulness of spirit which prevents our being ashamed in what we do towards him. Can you say, "Whatever I do, I do it honestly. Though I am not what I wish to be in all things, yet that which I profess before God is true"? Then you have confidence. "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see." I do not put spectacles over blind eyes, and make people believe that I can see, but I do really see. I know I do. I know I trust, I know I love God, I know I love holiness!" This deep sincerity breeds in a man a blessed indifference to the judgments of men. Having a conscience void of offence, he feels a holy freedom as to the formalities of pretence. Look at the hypocrite: he is afraid of being found out. He has to do everything most primly and demurely, lest he should be suspected. If you paint your face, you must take care neither to cry nor laugh, lest you crack the enamel. If you wear shoddy clothing, you must not run or jump, for your garments might split. Accidents must be guarded against when you deal with shams. A hypocrite will censure you very severely for having smiled just now; and he will condemn me outright for being so wicked as to make you smile on a Sunday. Poor soul, he must keep up his propriety, for it is all he has. In these times of bad trade many who are ready to fail are afraid to lower their expenditure for fear their poverty should be suspected, and so they keep up a good appearance to stave off bankruptcy as long as they may. If they were solvent they would not be so fearful. If your conscience condemn you not, then you enjoy a blessed ease of spirit, because the truth is in you.

The next kind of confidence is confidence towards God as to one's *acceptance* with him. If my heart says, "Yes, thou dost believe," then I know from God's word that I have eternal life. The Word saith, "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Conscience says, "Yes, thou hast faith"; and the heart concludes, There is therefore now no condemnation. Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Believe me, the sweetest stream that ever waters this desert world is the river of confident acceptance in the Beloved. When you know this, your life is gilded with the sunlight of the coming glory, and your heart rejoiceth exceedingly.

This produces, and perhaps it is that which the apostle most intended, *a boldness of converse.* The man who knows that he is truthful, and that God has accepted him, then speaks freely with God. He feels a holy awe of God, and never wishes to lose it; but yet he exercises a sacred boldness towards him. Is it not wonderful to see how Abraham talked with God? He went up to the place where God spake with him, and when God told him that he was about to destroy Sodom, how exquisitely, and yet how boldly did Abraham put it:—"Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? That be far from thee." What! Does Abraham expostulate with God? Does Abraham dream that God will do an unjust thing? Oh, no; but he is bold, and that is the most forcible plea which he can think of, and so he urges it again and again with God. How he pushes his case,—"I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes: peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for lack of five?" It is wonderful pleading, and it illustrates the words "confidence toward God." Look at Job, again. There was a man whose heart did not condemn him, for he could say, "Lord, thou knowest I am not wicked." He speaks with God very boldly, and he says, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him: I would come even to his seat; I would order my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments." Though the terrors of God might make him afraid, yet, secure in the quiet of his conscience, he has confidence towards God. Not only confidence *in* God, mark you, but *toward* God; so as to speak with God as a man speaketh with his friend. Do you understand this? I know you do not if you have any doubt as to your being a child of God. Suspicion makes you a coward; for when your heart does not condemn you, and you know that you are right before the Lord, then you feel liberty of converse.

This leads to great *confidence in prayer.* Look at the context. "We have confidence toward God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight." If you want power in prayer you must have purity in life. There is no promise in the Bible made to every one of you that whatsoever you ask God will give you: it is made to persons of a certain character; the unlimited promise is to the man of God who is so sanctified that he will not ask, and does not think of asking, anything that is not in accordance with God's will. Remember this passage—"Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." The desire of the man who delights in God is always in accordance with the mind of God, therefore he is the man that can get whatsoever he wills. When you do all things that please God, and your life is sanctified and holy, then it is that you abide in his love. Has not Jesus said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"? Unsanctified desires will be graciously refused; but the will of the sincerely obedient man is conformed to the will of God, and therefore it shall be fulfilled. "This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us."

Our text means also that such a man shall have confidence towards God, *in all service for God.* Look at the man of God who has confidence towards

God, as to *the perils encountered* in faithfully following his Lord. Take Daniel, for instance. Daniel does not question about what he has to do when the decree is signed that whosoever shall pray shall be cast into the den of lions; he throws up his window as he was accustomed to do; he looks towards Jerusalem, and he bows his knee as he had done aforetime, and he prays to God as if there were no edict. His confidence toward God is that he is safe in the path of duty. He does not count the cost; neither did the three holy children when the fiery furnace was before them, but they said, "Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." Is not that a blessed confidence towards God which a man obtains when his heart does not condemn him? If Daniel had said, "I shall pray down in the cellar, or with the blinds drawn down," he would have lost all confidence towards God, and would not have been the man he was. If the three children had said, "We will bow the knee, but we will make in our minds a secret protest; we will not really worship the idol, but we will worship God while we bow before the image," they would not have had confidence in God. Alas, what foolish tricks men play with what they call their consciences nowadays. This wonderful nineteenth century is altogether incomprehensible to a simple, honest man. Consciences used to work up and down, yes or no; but now they have an eccentric action, altogether indescribable. A man serves the devil nowadays, and gets the devil's pay, and all the while talks of serving God. May you have a conscience void of offence, straight and clear in everything, and so have confidence towards God.

Moreover, we have this confidence towards God in the way of service, so that we are sure of *receiving all necessary help.* God will help the true man, and if he comes to a pinch, and he cannot get on by himself, he may boldly summon others of his Master's servants to his aid. Look at Joshua fighting with the Amalekites. The day is not long enough, and, therefore, he lays his command upon the sun, and says to it, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, moon, in the valley of Ajalon"! He had need of longer day-light, and he dared the sun and moon to move an inch till the pursuit of his foes was over. Thus may a servant of God challenge help from earth and heaven, and impress all forces into the service of his Lord. An officer, if he finds himself in straits, impresses anybody that passes by, saying, "In the King's name, help me." Even so, if you do your Lord's bidding, and if conscience condemns you not, you may impress into the service of the great King every angel in heaven, and every force of nature, as need requires.

I wish I had time to tell you all that confidence towards God means. It means rest, *perfect rest.* Look at your Lord when the tempest was on. Loud roaring, the billows come near to overwhelming the ship; but he is asleep. Nobody but he could dare to slumber, because nobody else had such confidence towards God. He knew the vessel was safe; why should he worry? True, he was Lord High Admiral of the seas, and had responsibility not only for his own flagship, but for the whole fleet of little ships that sailed with him that day; but he did not give way to sleeplessness because of that; he cast himself on God, and fell

asleep. It was the best thing to do. You and I may do the same: we need not be frightened nor worried, nor troubled; but just trust in the Lord and do good, so shall we dwell in the land, and verily we shall be fed. This is confidence towards God.

This confidence often mounts up into *joy* till the Christian man overflows with delight in God; he cannot contain his happiness. As Solomon says, he eats his bread with joy, for God hath accepted his works. He lives with the wife of his youth in full content, and his children are a blessing to him. He goes to his toil rejoicing to serve God in his calling, and he comes home at night to repose himself in the care of his God and Father. All is well, and he knows it.

Blessed man, that hath confidence in God. Such a man goes up to his last bed when the message comes that the spirit must return to God who gave it; he goes *to die* without alarm: his conscience does not condemn him, and therefore he lays himself down in patience, and waits the signal to be with God. Meanwhile the light of heaven steals over his face, and they that come to cheer and comfort him hear strange words, like notes of the birds of Paradise, dropping from his lips. They see that he is in pain, but they also mark that he is baptized in enjoyment. They think that he is dying, but he testifies that he is entering into life. The pearly gate is open before him, the glitter of the golden street is meeting his failing eye. Hear him sing, as best his failing breath permits—

> "And when ye see my eye-strings break,
> How sweet my minutes roll;
> A mortal paleness on my cheek,
> But glory in my soul."

Now he is gone, gone into the land of spirits. He stands before his God, and he does not tremble. He has that eagle-eye which can bear the light of the eternal sun. His heart condemns him not, and he has confidence towards God. Amidst the supernal splendours he cries, "My Father," Angels are crying, "Lord and God," but *he* saith, "My Father," and those loyal servants make room for a royal child. The shining ones escort the happy spirit to the blessed Father's feet. There we leave him. "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God." God bless you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—1 John iii.

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THE HISTORY OF LITTLE-FAITH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 23RD, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—Matthew xiv. 31.

THERE is only one word in the original for the phrase, "O thou of little faith." The Lord Jesus virtually addresses Peter by the name of "Little-faith," in one word. I do not suppose that Peter had ever before dreamed of that name as applicable to himself. Possibly he had thought in his heart that his faith was strong even to assurance. When so lately he had seen his Master feed the multitudes with a few loaves and fishes, and had helped to gather up twelve baskets of fragments, he felt that his faith was equal to anything. He who could feed so many with so little, could do any kind of wonder; and how could Peter, brave, honest Peter, ever think of doubting his Lord? O brethren, we do not know ourselves! We fancy that we are rich and increased in goods, and, lo! in the time of trial we discover that we are naked, and poor, and miserable. Those who are strong in faith to their own thinking, may soon be brought into circumstances where their confidence will be grievously shaken. All is not gold that glitters, neither is all faith that speaks bravely. Peter is strong in faith on board the ship, strong in faith even as he walks the waters; but that unexpected gust of wind, which came howling down from the mountains, took him aback, staggered him, and caused his faith to reel. Then the waters yielded under his feet, and as he began to sink he discovered his own weakness, and had his discovery confirmed by the verdict of his Lord, who surnamed him *Little-faith*. Let no man think of himself beyond his own experience. Experience is the true gauge; and he who boasts of an untried faith is puffed up with vain glory. Stretch not your arm beyond your sleeve, lest it be frost-bitten. He who glories in himself deceives himself. It is not an easy thing to endure the humiliation which must follow upon the collapse of untried confidence. Rest assured, brethren, that between here and heaven we shall need every ounce of faith that we have; and that whenever we feel too sure of our own strength we are making sure of that which is frailty itself. Self-confidence is

but the froth on the top of the cup; it is not the pure juice of the vine of truth. When a man begins to be secure in himself he will court temptation, he will rashly venture upon needless experiments, and in the end will need to cry in plaintive accents, "Lord, save me." Learn, then, on the threshold of the text, that we are not as strong as we think we are, and that, when we are most brave and daring, we may not be quite so far removed from fear and trembling as we imagine. Alas! that unbelief should mar even Peter's faith. Let him who thinks that he can walk the waves take heed lest he sink beneath them.

In Peter's character there was a singular mixture of the strong and the weak: he rose to excellence and sank to littleness. Yet, why should I speak of this as singular? for we ourselves are made of much the same materials: in us also are mingled the iron and the clay. The best of men are men at the best. Since the old nature remains, though the new nature is born in us, there is in our soul a conflict between holiness and sin, faith and unbelief, strength and weakness. We walk the waters like our Lord, and anon we sink like doubting Peter. The Christian man is full often a mystery to himself, and, therefore, it is no wonder that he is a mystery to other people. Note how Peter speaks: he cries, "Lord, if it be thou": a speech which, if it be not censurable, is by no means praiseworthy, after his Lord had said, "It is I." Hear him again: "Bid me come unto thee on the water." Here is courage almost blazing into rashness; and yet there is a measure of obedient deference, for he will not attempt to come unless he is bidden to do so. He will risk his life if he has but his Master's permit. What diverse qualities meet in the same man! He proposes a rash venture, and yet is prudent enough to ask his Master's permission.

See him walking the waves, and admire the strength of his faith! Could *you* do this? Anon see him sinking because a fierce blast has blown in his face. Do you marvel at his unbelief? Would you have done better? He that knows himself knows that doubt dogs the heels of confidence. The Canaanite of distrust is still in the land, and shows himself ever and anon at unexpected turns. Where the fairest flowers of faith, and hope, and joy do bloom, the deadliest serpents of mistrust and suspicion may yet be lurking. Abraham, that father of believers, yet sinned twice by distrust when he did not own Sarah to be his wife.

Peter's mixture of unbelief was not to be justified, nor may it be used as an excuse for ourselves. We shall speak of it as a matter of fact, but not as an example; for it was an improper and unreasonable thing. Peter could not answer the Lord's question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" His doubting was without ground or reason. If he believes at all, why does he doubt? The unbelief which makes faith little is to be confessed as a sin, and mourned over as such; it would be wrong to regard it as a mere infirmity, and invent excuses for it. The truth is that the Christian has no cause for doubting his Lord. The whole course of the Lord's dealing is calculated to inspire confidence. He has done nothing to create a suspicion of his love, or truth, or power. If we never doubt till we have cause for doubting, our life will be rich with faith. It is concerning little faith, and its faults and its unreasonableness, that I have to speak at this time: may God grant that all the Little-faith family may be helped to stronger con-

fidence. May the Holy Ghost bless the word, and enable many a Ruth to pick up those handfuls that are let fall on purpose for the feeble folk who glean in these fields.

I. Our first topic will be LITTLE-FAITH'S HISTORY. It is sketched in the story of Peter. We are each one apt to act over again the part which Peter played in this narrative.

Little-faith is a true disciple, though a faulty one. Not the littleness of the faith, but the faith itself is the gift of God. None but God could make a grain of mustard seed; none but God can give even the least particle of living faith. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, however feeble it may be, is a fruit of the Spirit of God, and a token of the new birth. I may say of Peter on this occasion what the Lord Jesus said of him at another time, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." Even the faith which can get no further than to touch the hem of Christ's garment is the work of the Spirit of God: even that faith which cries, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" is, as to its existence, though not as to its infirmity, the creation of the most High. Wherefore let us note that Little-faith is born in the new Jerusalem, and is an Israelite indeed; hence it has about it that immortal life of which our risen Lord has said, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

Very early in its life *Little-faith has great longings.* See it in Peter's case. He is on board ship with his brethren while Jesus is yonder upon the waters; and Peter is so earnest to come at his Lord, and be with him, that he is ready to plunge into the sea to reach him. Why could he not wait as the others did? His immediate duty was in the ship with his brethren; but his vehement desires carried him above commonplace toiling and rowing. Strong faith exhibits patience where Little-faith is in a hurry. It was well to have longings for Jesus; but it would have been wiser to have waited while the Lord came walking over the sea to the ship. The quiet, self-possessed Christian has deep longings for his Lord; but he has the assured conviction that his Lord will come to him if he continues faithful to his present duty, and therefore he waits upon the Lord. Little-faith, like Martha, runs to meet Jesus; but Strong-faith, like Mary, sits still in the house. Little-faith is feverish after immediate joy. Little-faith wants to be in heaven to-morrow. Little-faith would convert the world before the sun went down, and she grows faint because her zeal has not fulfilled her wish. Little-faith must pluck the promises while they are green, she is not content to wait till they become ripe and mellow. Yet I love her longings, and I would to God that all men had them! However mistaken pressing desires for spiritual joy may be, they are things that come not into unrenewed hearts. Those blessed longings after Christ which some of you feel, which make you cry, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!"—you may thank God for them. Those who have greater faith know that they have found their Lord; they know that he is as the sun which cannot be hidden; they feel his warmth, and rejoice in his light; yet the keen hunger after Christ which goes with Little-faith is an admirable thing, and the Lord himself hath blessed it. I rejoice in the blossom of the apple-tree; it is not so valuable as the

fruit, but it is exceedingly beautiful; and, even so, the eager longings of a trembling heart after the Lord Jesus are full of loveliness and fragrance, and are by no means to be despised. It is the nature of little-faith that it should be of a thirsty and eager temperament, and hasty to make a dash for present fellowship with Christ.

Little-faith was daring. Early in her life she had intense longings, and they grew so that Little-faith was willing to venture everything to have her longings fulfilled. "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water"—thus doth Little-faith cry to her Lord. These are big words, but they come out of a trembling heart. Men often venture all the more because their capital is so small. Souls who are little in faith are often put upon desperate measures to gain hope. O beloved, are there not some of you who would give your eyes and ears, and your very lives, to see Christ, and to taste of his love? You have come up to the Tabernacle this morning feeling that if Christ bade you plunge into the sea to find him, you would think nothing of it. You feel like Rutherford when he said he could swim through seven hells to get at Christ, and think them nothing if he might but lie at his feet.

Those vehement and burning desires within your spirit after your Lord and Master are sharp but exceedingly blessed things: you need not repress them, even though they urge you to venture everything for Christ's sake. Love's ventures for Christ will end in great profit. What shall it damage a man if he lose the whole world and gain his Saviour? What loss could there be to a man though he himself sank in the sea, so long as his Lord stood there to stretch forth his hand and snatch him from destruction? Little-faith can yet be a true hero when the Lord saith to her, "Come." It is not the sea she fears: her concern is lest the Lord should frown upon her.

At times Little-faith accomplishes great wonders. Peter, when his Master said, "Come," went down upon the waters and walked the waves with ease. The Lord puts forth his strength even when we reveal our own weakness of faith. Peter took one step, and then another upon the rolling wave, wondering all the while how ever it could be. Has not your little-faith done this? I remember the first step of faith I took, how I wondered at it, and wondered at myself. Have not you also been amazed at yourselves? Do you remember when you believed that God had saved you, seeing you had faith in Christ? Then, though you knew it to be true, you could hardly tell whether you should laugh for joy or cry for fear, when you thought upon the possibility of your being saved in Christ Jesus. You dared to believe that you were adopted into the family of God, and started back as your heart said, "How can he put me among the children?" Do you recollect reading the doctrine of election in Holy Scripture, and at last saying, "Surely, I am one of the chosen: the Lord hath loved me with an everlasting love; therefore with loving-kindness hath he drawn me"? Was it not a piece of daring to you? Walking on the water could not have been more venturesome. You stood upright when tempted; you held on, though sore beset by the enemy; you walked towards Jesus, though the way seemed to be on the sea; a high exhilaration upraised your spirit, you rose out of yourself; but yet down deep within there was a latent fear, a half-developed apprehension that

your confidence was too good to last, that your joy was presumptuous. In your very heart you were afraid of sinking; and it was no wonder that by-and-by your fear became matter of fact.

But now comes in another bit of our history: *Little-faith is too apt to look away from the Lord.* Peter, as he walked those billows, took his eye off from his Master, and just then a tremendous hurricane rushed boisterously in his face, and poor Peter was alarmed. He had thought of the fickleness of the waves, but he had overlooked the fury of the wind. When he spoke to the Lord, he said, "If it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water"; and so his faith had reckoned with the water, but it had not reckoned upon the force of the wind. That mysterious and subtle agent took him by surprise. He had forgotten that he had both winds and waves to contend with; and now the wind comes upon him as a new trial; as the blast came full in Peter's face, it chilled him to the marrow, and chilled his heart too. He heard the wind, but forgot the voice which said, "It is I; be not afraid." This is the danger of Little-faith. Little-faith, at the outset, is scarcely comprehensive enough; it does not take a full view of all the possible dangers and difficulties; and so, when that which it has omitted comes to the front, it is very apt to be sorely troubled. Little-faith, thy hope lies in keeping thy little self wholly dependent upon thy great Lord. If thou beginnest to measure circumstances, it will go ill with thee, poor trembling creature that thou art! What have you and I to do with measuring? There is one that measures with a span the whole world, and weighs the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance. With unmeasured faith let us leave ourselves in the hands of our immeasurable God; so shall our souls be kept in perfect peace, stayed on him. I walk the waves; yet not I, but Jesus: therefore will I not look to the winds, but to Jesus; neither will I think of sinking, but see him standing and hope in him.

Now, the moment he took his eye off his Master and thought of the wind, *Little-faith began to sink.* You see him going down; he is ready to perish; the proud waters prevail against him; he has no power whatever to help himself. I should suppose that Peter being a fisherman, could swim. Why did he not strike out? Mark this, when a man begins to live by faith, if his faith fails him, even his natural ability fails with his faith. He that could swim with no faith originally, will not swim when once by faith he has begun to walk the waters. Should he fail in his walking he cannot fall back on his swimming. "Beginning to sink" is a terrible condition. Poor Little-faith, it never reckoned on this! Deep experiences are all the more dreadful because unlooked for. When Peter left the ship-board, and slid down the side of the barque, and touched the sea, his first miraculous footsteps so elated him that he hardly thought it possible that he would before long be on the verge of drowning; but now down he goes, like lead in the mighty waters. The billows open wide their great mouths to swallow up poor Little-faith, and down he goes. Is that the condition of any child of God here this morning? I must confess it has sometimes been mine. There was a step, and scarce a step, between me and death. That which bore me up appeared to give way, and the waters came in even unto my soul.

Let me not finish this history of Little-faith without saying that *Little-faith knew how to pray.* Though Peter did not know how to come to Christ on the waters, he knew how to come to him by prayer. Though his faith was not *what* it ought to be, it was *where* it ought to be; for his cry was to his Lord alone. He did not appeal to his brethren in the vessel, but only to his dear Master who stood so firmly on the rolling wave. He did not cry, "John, save me!" but "Lord, save me." It was a short prayer, but it was a comprehensive one. It expressed his need of salvation; it proved his faith in the Lord's will to save him; it owned Jesus to be his Lord, and it tacitly admitted that the Lord could save him, and none else. In his prayer Peter quits all other hope, and looks wholly and solely to Jesus, crying, "Lord, save me!" His faith quotes what the Lord had done for others in healing, feeding, and saving them, and now he cries, "Lord, save *me!*" He asks Jesus to act as his name implies he would do: he practically says, "Saviour, save me." He appeals to his authority: "Thou art my Lord, and thou didst bid me come; therefore as Lord save thine own servant. Save me." His short cry is full of force. Let us imitate both its shortness and its fulness. Whenever faith is weak let prayer be strong. When you cannot do anything else but cry, then cry with might and main. If it is less the cry of faith, let it be all the more the cry of agony. "Beginning to sink, he cried, Lord, save me." Little children are good at crying, if at nothing else, and so is Little-faith. When Jacob was greatly afraid, he became bold enough to wrestle at Jabbok. Even Little-faith has prayer for its vital breath, its native air. Where there is life, there is breath; and where there is faith, there is prayer. O soul, art thou sinking? Then cry, "Lord, save me!"

Now in this little picture, have any of you recognised yourselves? Do you long for Christ? Would you venture all things for his dear sake? Do you trust him? Have you enjoyed happy moments when by faith you have accomplished things impossible to mere sense? Have you sometimes believed, and in that belief found an upbearing for your spirit that made you more than conqueror? Then, if at this moment there should be a collapse, and your faith should waver, pray unto the Lord. *He* stands fast if you do not. It is your wisdom to cry mightily in this your time of need; and as surely as the Lord liveth, he will come to your rescue. Among all the carcases that shall be washed up on the Dead Sea shore there shall never be found the corpse of Little-faith. Though Little-faith has often said, "I shall one day fall by the hand of the enemy," no weapon has yet been forged that can strike its heart, or break its bones. He that believeth even with a little and a trembling believing, is safe beneath the guardian care of the Eternal God. "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler."

At the end Little-faith will grow to full assurance, and will come up into the vessel, yea, unto heaven with Christ. Little-faith shall find its way across the Jordan, and stand in its lot in the end of the days; and perhaps among the most rapturous song that shall ever salute the Redeemer's ear will be the song of those who were weak and trembling when they were here below, and yet were kept unto the end. Wherefore, have confidence!

II. I come now to the second head of my discourse, which is an interesting one—LITTLE-FAITH ACKNOWLEDGED BY THE LORD. In my text you will observe the Saviour did not say, "O thou of no faith," or "O thou of pretended faith," but "O thou of little faith." There are times when we would give all that we have if we could only have our Master's assurance that we have even a little faith. If he does but own that it is faith, then the root of the matter is in us. I would rather have great faith than little faith; but I would rather have little faith than have great presumption, and mistake it for holy confidence. It ought to have comforted Peter, even as it did rebuke him, to hear his Lord, who could not make a mistake, acknowledge that he had faith.

In following up this subject, note that little faith is faith, and *little faith is true faith.* A grain of mustard seed has life in it as surely as the tree beneath whose spreading boughs the birds of the air find shelter. A spark is as truly fire as the conflagration which burned down a city. Little faith is not such powerful faith as great faith, but it is quite as true faith. O soul, if thou hast a ray of light, it came from the sun; if thou hast a pulse of life, it comes from the heart; if thou hast any measure of faith, it is the work of the Spirit of God. A pearl is a pearl, though it be no bigger than a pin's head. God's signature is as valid when he writes it small as when he uses capitals.

In Peter's case *little faith was faith with a very solid reason at the back of it.* O child of God, little as thy faith may be, yet if thou believest in Christ thou hast faith most proper and justifiable; in fact, so strong is the ground of thy little faith that the Saviour even asks thee, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" As much as to say, "You have every reason for your faith, but what reason have you for doubting?" Oh, dear heart, if thou dost come to Christ and cast thyself on him thou art doing the best and the rightest thing that thou canst do, and none can question thy conduct. Ay, if thou dost even swoon away upon the dear bosom of the eternal love, none shall tear thee off, none shall separate thee, even in thy feebleness, from Christ. He has said that him that cometh to him he will in no wise cast out; who, then, can dismiss thee from his presence? Thou art not presumptuous, thou art not going beyond what is permitted thee when thou dost trust thyself and thine all on Christ thy Lord. Do it again, and do it again more thoroughly, and thou shalt never be ashamed of having done it; nay, it shall be thy glory that thou darest to trust thy Lord. His promise shall never be outdone by thy faith. Open thy mouth wide, and he will fill it. Ask more faith, and he will give more faith, and fulfil to thee greater promises; go from faith to faith, and thou shalt receive blessing upon blessing. There is no limit to thy Lord's love; make free with it; there is no reason why thou shouldst hesitate. Christ owned little faith to be faith with a solid reason at its back when he said, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?"

Our Lord Jesus owned little-faith because, little as it was, *it ventured all for him.* Peter had thrown himself into the sea to come to his Master, and the Lord recognized that fact. He who ventures all for Jesus and on Jesus shall not find it to be a losing speculation. Though you dare not say that you have strong faith, yet you give up the world's pleasures, and its sinful gains, and its pleasing smiles, for Christ; you

would not deny him for all the treasures of Egypt: well, then, our Lord will acknowledge you as his, and bear you harmless in the end. That little faith, which is real faith, knows nothing of the timidity which haunts the heart of the hypocrite. Little-faith fears lest it should not be accepted at the last, but it is not afraid of being persecuted for Christ's sake. No, let me but know that I am his and he is mine; I will go through fire, and through water, to be with him.

Little-faith, in the case of Peter, *was coming to Jesus all the while.* Peter, when he left the ship, left it to come to Jesus, and for that purpose only. The first step he took upon the sea was towards Jesus, and every other step was towards Jesus; and when he began to sink he sank that way, leaning towards his Master, and crying as he went down, "Lord, save me!" Now, the Lord Jesus always owns a faith which comes towards him, however lame it may be. If thou hast a faith which looks to thyself, a curse rests upon it. If thou hast a faith which looks to priests, it is superstition. If thou hast a faith which looks to ceremonies, creeds, prayers, and feelings, it will fail thee when most thou needest help. But if thou hast a faith whose eyes are to Jesus, whose longings are for Jesus, whose hopes are all centred in Jesus, whose steps all tend to Jesus, then thou hast a faith upon which Jesus sets his seal, and though he calls it "little," yet he calls it "faith." Be sure that that which the Lord himself owns to be faith is faith, even though for the present it leaves thee damp with the brine from which thou art newly plucked.

Once more, the Master acknowledges this faith; for, *before long, Little-faith came to walk with Jesus on the sea.* I think I have seen a picture of Peter sinking and Christ stooping to save him; but I wish that some eminent artist would paint the two walking together in peace, Peter and his Lord. What joy to think that Little-faith, once drawn from the deep, stands on those foaming waves side by side with the great saving Lord! Now is Peter conformed to his Lord. Now is the servant clothed with the might of his Master. We have aforetime seen the Son of God walking in the fire with the three holy youths, and now we see the obverse of the medal—a saint walking on the water with the Son of Man. Is it not a splendid, re-assuring truth, that Little-faith can grow to act like Christ? The day shall yet come when the Lord shall have so strengthened Little-faith that the things that the Lord doeth shall Little-faith do also, and the word shall be fulfilled, "Greater works than these shall ye do; because I go unto my Father." You tell me that you cannot rejoice to-day; but Jesus will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice. You cannot go forth to Christian service, for you are lame through spiritual weakness; but the day cometh when the lame man shall leap as a hart. The Healer of his people will lay his hand upon you, and make you "strong in the Lord and in the power of his might." You have a greater consciousness to-day of your inability in yourself than you have of your ability in the Lord; but it shall not always be so; the time will come when in rapt fellowship with him, by the strength of his grace, you shall be in this world even as he is, and that glorious life which in the person of Christ trod on the sea as though it were a sea of glass, that same life shall be in you, so that you shall overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil.

I feel right glad to have even a little faith. I am truly sorry that it is so little when I know that my Lord deserves all possible confidence; but yet I am glad that it is given to me to believe on his name, for it has brought me near him, and will bring me yet nearer, and will by-and-by bring me to be with him where he is, and to behold his glory.

Thus I have shown you that our Lord acknowledged little faith. He did not break the bruised reed, nor disown the infant faith; but he called it faith, answered its prayer, and made it to stand with him in fellowship of power.

III. In the third place I want you to notice LITTLE-FAITH'S DELIVERANCE. Little-faith began to sink, but it was only a beginning. The sinking did not end in Peter's drowning, but in his Lord's saving. The text saith, "beginning to sink"; and truly that is the whole matter. None of God's people shall go beyond "beginning to sink." We may be "ready to perish," but we shall not actually perish. Our steps may be "almost gone," but "almost" is not "quite." A man may be near death, and yet live; he may begin to sink, and yet be saved. Friend, it may be that for some time you have been "beginning to sink"; but you have not sunk yet. Not yet are you consumed, not yet is the Lord's mercy clean gone for ever: not yet hath he forgotten to be gracious. Oftentimes "beginning to sink" with us, is with Christ beginning to stretch out his hand. The beginning of a clear sense of our own weakness, is often the beginning of the display of the power of God.

Little-faith received its deliverance *wholly from the Lord.* As I have already said, it was not Peter's swimming that got him out of his trouble, nor was it any revival of Peter's faith which did it, but the Lord came to the rescue, and proved his power to help at a dead lift. So shall it be with thee, O trembling heart: in the hour of thine extremity God shall appear for thee. The Lord will provide. Out of weakness thou shalt be made strong; for he hath said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

It was of the Lord, and therefore it was *immediate.* Will you kindly note that word in the text, "and immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand." Before he rebuked him for his little faith, he delivered him from his peril. O Little-faith, thou hast but to cry, and the Lord will help thee. Do not thou delay thy crying, and he will not delay his helping. The Lord may let the matter proceed some considerable distance till we think it is all over with us; but in the nick of time he will appear for our deliverance. At that dark moment when we read our own death-warrant amid the roar of the tempest, the prompt relief of the Lord of love will arrive. No wings of cherubim can be more swift than the Lord's right hand when he means to draw his people from great waters.

It is added, "immediately *he stretched forth his hand.*" It was an instructive action on the part of Jesus that stretching forth of his hand; as if he was arousing himself to the utmost energy, and reaching beyond himself to rescue his servant. A stretched-out hand denotes the exercise of all the power of the person thus acting. In the case of God's people, it has often been necessary that he should bring them forth with a high hand and with an outstretched arm. Peter had his exodus from the water as Israel from Egypt. Who is to know the might of God's arm

if he does not stretch it out? And why should it be stretched out unless there is a need for it? So that our perils produce the necessity for God to stretch out his hand, and thus they turn out to be comfortable means of grace to us. Our necessities are the doors through which the Lord's great bounty comes to us. If Little-faith did not lift up its cry of dismay, the Lord's hand would not be lifted up for its rescue.

It is added, he "*caught him.*" Thus the Lord came into personal contact with his servant. See, he holds him up. The whole weight of Peter is on Christ. If Peter sinks, Jesus must sink too; for he will not quit his hold. For the time Peter and Christ are joined; they have only one standing, and that standing is all in Christ. O Little-faith, thou dost feel a closer union to Christ in thine hour of danger than ever before. It comes to this, that when Jesus interposes to save Little-faith, he bends all his strength to the deed, and takes hold of the sinking one with a grip so fast and firm, that the two must sink or stand together. All the weight of Peter was on Jesus; all the security of Jesus was bestowed on Peter. Little-faith holds Jesus while Jesus upholds Little-faith. A half-hoping, half-despairing soul lays hold on Jesus with an iron grip, and on such a poor feeble one the hold of Jesus is equally tight and strong. He will never let the sinking sinner die when once that prayer has been uttered, "Lord, save me." I hardly know of a more conscious union between a man and Christ than that which is effected when in sinking times the grip of the crucified hand is felt as our sole rescue from death. "Hallelujah, who shall part Christ's own bride from Christ's own heart?" Who is he that shall separate the most timid and trembling of all the believing company from that eternal hand which is sworn to deliver? "I give unto my sheep eternal life," saith he, "and they shall never perish"; nor shall they though the heavens and the earth should pass away. The Lord must and will stretch out his hand and catch the sinking one, and grant him the same standing as himself.

IV. I close with LITTLE-FAITH REBUKED. That comes last. After the poor soul is quite rescued, and set on a sure footing, then comes the loving chiding: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" This is such a gentle rebuking that it almost seems to me that the Master might say as much as this to us when we enter Paradise with him. It might not be unkind even there to say, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" When you and I have come up from our dying beds, and left all pain, and poverty, and sorrow, far behind, we shall find ourselves in the golden-streeted city, and the Well-Beloved with us, and we shall look back on all the way whereby he led us; and then he may lovingly whisper in our ear, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Look back on thy pilgrim way. There is the Slough of Despond dried up; there is Giant Despair's head on a pole; there is Apollyon bound with chains; there is the river whose chill stream so often affrighted thee, glittering in the eternal light. "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" You doubted about nothing. You made mountains out of molehills. Where everything was working for you, you said with trembling Jacob, "All these things are against me." Will not our Lord produce a rapture within our spirit while he brings to mind his unchanging love, his

immutable truth, his immovable faithfulness? We shall eternally wonder at our own doubts. What if our Lord should say, "Didst thou not come up from the wilderness leaning upon me as thy beloved? Did I ever fail thee? Did I ever give thee a cross word? Say, did I ever leave thee or forsake thee? Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Then we shall sweetly chide ourselves to think we ever had a moment's distrust of our dear Lord, the Bridegroom of our souls, in whom our faith ought to have been constant as the day.

Notice, dear friends, with regard to this question, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" that it is an *inconsistent* thing for a believing man to doubt his God, or distrust the power of the Lord Jesus. You do believe, and if you believe, why doubt? If faith, why *little* faith? If you doubt, why believe? And if you believe, why doubt? Oil and water will not mix. Oh, how should faith and unbelief unite? Yet they are often found together in deadly warfare. "Oh," said a dear sister in Christ to me the other day, "I cannot doubt my God." Yet she also expressed a fear lest she should be wrong at the last. This was an odd mixture in one who knew so well the glorious gospel; but then we are all odd in some way or other. In any case it is not meet that we believe and yet disbelieve. Shall a fountain send forth both sweet water and bitter? Begone ye doubts! Oh that they would go at my bidding! What business have ye here at the festival of faith? Begone, ye harpies, that devour the bread of the Lord's table, and defile our dainty things! What right have ye to enter the holy abodes of faith?

While doubts are so inconsistent, are they not also most *dishonouring?* Why should we doubt our Lord? Shall it go forth to the world that we cannot trust Christ? Shall it be said that those who are saved by him, nevertheless, say it is hard work to believe him? Hard to believe him who has proven his love by the agony and bloody sweat! My Lord, I will sooner doubt my brother, and doubt my father, and doubt my wife, than doubt thee! My Lord, I will doubt my eyes, and doubt my ears, and doubt the beating of my heart, sooner than doubt thee! I will doubt the laws of nature, I will doubt everything that seems certain, I will doubt the conclusions of mathematics; but thee, oh wherefore, wherefore, should I doubt thee? Nay, let us hold on to the love of Jesus and cling to him, even though he should frown and chasten. Be it ours to trust a scourging God! Yea, say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."

Once again, how *inexcusable* is this doubting among you who do believe! The only excuses worth mentioning are these. Some excuse themselves because they desire to be humble. "I dare not think that these good things are true to me, I know that I am altogether unworthy of them, and I am afraid of being proud if I take them to myself." Do you not know, dear friend, that the biggest pride in all the world is doubting God? and it is the sweetest humility to trust in God as a child trusts its father. It is the lowliest action of the heart to say, "These things are good, exceeding good, and I am most unworthy; but then the Lord hath said that he gives these gracious gifts to the unworthy; and, if he hath said it, God forbid that I should question him." Who am I that I should venture to raise a doubt about the *bona fides* of the Lord Jehovah? I must, I will cease from all such

proud questionings and artful doubtings and be even as a new-born babe, drinking in the unadulterated milk of the Word.

I am persuaded that unbelief is sometimes occasioned by ignorance. I pray you, do not let such ignorance remain in you. Be diligent in searching Holy Scripture. If you do not know the Lord, nor know his providence, nor know the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints, nor know the covenant of grace, why, then you may be staggered ; but learn those things that you may be established.

I have no doubt that unbelief is caused not only by ignorance, but by forgetfulness. We forget the Lord's past mercies. If the Lord has plucked you like a brand out of the fire, cannot he pluck you out of the sea ? He that delivered you from the deadly power of sin, cannot he deliver you from every temptation ? In fact, the Lord has done more for us already than he ever will have to do for us in the future ; for he will never have to die again upon the bloody tree, and he will never have to offer himself again as an atonement for our sin. Nine hundred and ninety-nine parts out of a thousand are ours already. We have only to shut our eyes and open them in heaven, and the rest will be ours. To-day is our salvation nearer than when we believed. We are almost home ! Within sight of the white cliffs of the better land ! Shall we tremble now ? Shall we not begin to rejoice with joy unspeakable ? Does not little-faith begin to mount into assurance ?

You that have not believed in Jesus, I have tried to show the way of salvation by faith in Christ. You that have believed but tremblingly, I have pointed out to you much that ought to comfort you. And to you who can believe with full assurance, I would say, Guard that full assurance with great care; it is heaven below, it is the beginning of heaven above. The Lord, the Holy Spirit, be with you all, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xiv. 13—36.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—191, 739, 733.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE NECESSITY OF GROWING FAITH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 30TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth."—2 Thessalonians i. 3.

LAST Lord's-day I tried to say cheering and encouraging words to "Little-faith." I trust that the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, did thereby strengthen some to whom the Saviour said, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" But none of us would desire to remain among the Little-faiths; we long to press forward in our march to the better land. If we have just started in the heavenly race, it is well; there are grounds of comfort about the first steps in the right way; but we are not going to stop at the starting-point; our desire is towards the winning-post and the crown. My prayer at the commencement of this discourse is, that we may each of us rise out of our little faith into the loftier region of assurance, so that those who love us best may be able to say, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly."

The church of Jesus Christ at Thessalonica did not commence under very propitious circumstances. Remember that oft-quoted text about the Bereans: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so." That record does not relate to the converts in Thessalonica, but to those Jews who heard Paul preach in the synagogue, and refused to test his teaching by a reference to the Old Testament. They were not a noble sort of people, and yet from among them there were taken by almighty grace a certain company who were led to believe in the true Messiah. Thus they became more noble than even the Bereans; for we do not hear of a church in Berea, neither was an epistle written to the Bereans. Thessalonica received two epistles, bright with hearty commendations. Paul praised the Philippians, but the Thessalonians he praised yet more, thanking God at every remembrance of them, and glorying in them among the churches of God for their patience and faith.

I shall ask you, with your Bibles open, to see whether we cannot account in some measure for this remarkable condition of things. The verse before us is full of thanksgiving to God for the growth of the Thessalonians in faith and in love; and to my mind it sounds like an echo of the First Epistle to the Thessalonians. The First Epistle is the key and the cause of the Second. Very often a man's success in this place, or in that, will tally with his own condition of heart in relation to that place. As we sow we reap. The grace of God enabled Paul to sow toward the Thessalonians with great hopefulness, and trust, and prayerfulness, and consequently he reaped plentifully.

Observe how (1 Thess. i. 2, 3) Paul began by distinctly recognising the existence of faith and love in that Church. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father." Recognise the root, and then look for the flower. See that faith is in the soul, smile upon it and foster it, and then you may expect that the faith will steadily increase. In our text Paul mentions faith as growing, and love as abounding, while in the next verse he mentions patience, which is the outgrowth of hope—"the patience of hope." He noticed in the Thessalonians the birth of those three divine sisters—faith, hope, and charity. That which he recognised with pleasure he afterwards saw growing exceedingly: those who cherish the seed shall rejoice in the plant. Observe in the children under your care the first blossoms of any good thing, and you shall observe its increase. Despise not the day of small things. When you have learned to recognise faith in its buds, you shall soon see faith in its flowers, and faith in its fruits. Do not overlook feeble grace, or criticize it because it is as yet imperfect; but mark its beginnings with thankfulness, and you shall behold its advance with delight.

In addition to recognising the beginnings of faith, Paul laboured hard to promote it. Look in the second chapter, and read verses 7, 8, 11, 12:—"But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." He threw his whole strength into the work of upbuilding that church, toiling night and day for it; and consequently he obtained his desire; for still it is true in the husbandry of God, that those who sow, and steep their seed in the tears of earnestness, shall doubtless come again rejoicing, bringing their sheaves with them.

Paul had accompanied his public labours with his private prayers. See how 1 Thessalonians iii. 12 tallies with our text:—"And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you." This was his prayer; and he received exactly what he prayed for. He saw abounding love in each one towards every other. The Lord seemed to have noted the wording of Paul's prayer, and to have answered him according to the letter of his request. If we open our mouth wide, the Lord will fill it. Brethren,

what we comfortably recognise in its gracious beginnings, what we labour to increase and what we earnestly guard with prayer, shall in due time be granted to us!

More than this: Paul had gone on to exhort them to abound in love and faith. Look at Chapter iv. verse 9: "As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more." Paul did not only quietly pray for the church, but he added his earnest admonitions. He bids them increase more and more; and in response they do increase, so that he says, "Your faith groweth exceedingly." When a man says, "more and more" it is only another way of saying "exceedingly": is it not so? There was a big heart in Paul towards the Thessalonians. He wanted them to grow in faith and love "more," and then to take another step, and add another "more" to it. The exhortation being given out of a full heart, behold, God has fulfilled it to his servant, and the people have willingly followed up the apostolic precept.

But Paul had added faith to his prayers and his exhortations. Look at chapter v. verses 23, 24, and see if it is not so. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." When we are sure that God will do it, it will surely be done. We miss many a blessing because we ask without faith. The apostle believed that he had the petition which he had sought of the Lord; and he received according to his faith. He who can firmly believe shall ere long fervently pour out thanksgiving. The church at Thessalonica, the child of Paul's prayers, the child of his labours, and at last the child of his faith, obtained a remarkable degree of faith, and a singular warmth of love. The Lord give to us who are workers the mind and spirit of Paul, and lead us to follow him in our conduct to others, and then I do not doubt that our good wishes shall be realiz d. If we are right ourselves, we shall see prosperity in the churches, or classes, or families whose good we seek; and as we feel bound to pray about them, we shall also feel bound to thank God concerning them.

Before I plunge into the sermon, I should like to pause, and ask whether we as Christian men and women are such that Paul could say of us, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." What think you? Could your pastor bless God for you? Could your nearest and dearest Christian friend feel that he was bound to thank God always for you? If not, why not? Oh that we may rise into such a happy state that we shall be the cause of gratitude in others! It ought to be so; we ought to glorify God, causing men to see our good works, and praise our Father in heaven.

One more question: Do you think we are in such a condition that it would be safe for anybody to praise us? Would it be safe to ourselves for us to be thus commended, and made subjects of thankfulness? It takes a great deal of grace to be able to bear praise.

Censure seldom does us much hurt. A man struggles up against slander, and the discouragement which comes of it may not be an unmixed evil; but praise soon suggests pride, and is therefore not an unmixed good. "As the fining-pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; so is a man to his praise." Would it be safe if Paul were here to say good things about you as he did about the Thessalonians? Did it not prove that the brethren there were sober, well-established believers?

Once more, do you ever feel it in your heart to talk like this about your fellow-Christians? Paul himself was in a fine condition when he could thus extol his brethren. Few men are ready with hearty commendations of others. We are greedy in receiving praise, and niggardly in dispensing it. We seldom speak too kindly of one another. Now and then you hear a person say, "There is no such thing as love in the church at all." I know that gentleman very well, and I never saw any excess of love in *him*. I heard one say, "Brotherly love is all a mockery; there is no reality in Christian charity"; and truly he measured his own corn very accurately. Most men would see others better if their own eyes were clearer. When a man honestly feels that his fellow-Christians are for the most part much better than himself, and that he would willingly sit at the feet of many of them, then he is himself in a healthy state. I admire the grace of God in many around me. I see their imperfections as though I did not see them. I am not looking for the thorns, but for the roses; and I see so many of them that my heart is glad, and in spirit I bless the name of the Lord.

The man who can commend the work of the Lord in others without saying a word about himself, has, by that fact, given himself a good character; his eyes must have been washed in the fountains of love; they must have been cleansed from the dust of pride, envy, and self, or he would not have so seen or so spoken. I love the text because it is an instance of a man of great grace, of a man under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, who yet delighted to speak enthusiastically of a church which certainly was far from perfect. I delight in that eye which can be a little blind to faults while it exercises a clear vision in seeing all that is good and praiseworthy towards God.

So, then, we come to our text, and the subject runs thus: for us to grow in faith is *a subject for devout thanksgiving;* and in the second place, it is *an object for diligent endeavour.* Thirdly, if we greatly grow in faith it will be *the source of other growths:* for as faith increases, love, patience, and every other virtue, will flourish.

I. For us to grow and increase in faith is A SUBJECT FOR DEVOUT THANKSGIVING. Paul gives a commendation of the Thessalonian church which is exceedingly warm and hearty. One critic says the words may be regarded as somewhat extravagant, after the mode of the Apostle when he wishes to be emphatic. He writes fervidly: "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." It is an intense and unreserved commendation. As I have already said, this church was not absolutely perfect; for, because of the love of every one towards another, and their great kindness towards the poor, certain unworthy persons encroached upon their liberality. To use a very rough word, *cadgers* were multiplied among them, as they always are where generosity abounds. Shame that it should be so.

Read chapter iii. verse 11: "For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies." There had been also among them here and there a person of loose life and of sharp business dealings, and to such he spoke in the First Epistle; but these flies in the pot of ointment did not destroy its sweetness. They were so few comparatively that Paul speaks of the whole body with approbation. When our faith shall grow and our love abound, it may be proper for a pastor to speak with unrestricted admiration of what the Lord has done.

The blessing of increased faith is of unspeakable value, and therefore praise should be largely rendered for it. Little faith will save, but strong faith is that which builds up the church, which overcomes the world, which wins sinners, and which glorifies God. Little-faith is slow and feeble, and to suit his pace the whole flock travel softly. Little-faith is a wounded soldier, and has to be carried in an ambulance by the armies of the Lord; but faith which grows exceedingly, lifts the banner aloft, leads the van, meets hand to hand the foes of our Prince, and puts them to the rout. If we were invoking blessings upon a church we could scarcely ask for a larger boon than that all the brethren might be strong in faith, giving glory to God. Strong-faith ventures into large endeavours for Christ, and hence missions are projected: Strong-faith carries out the projects of holy zeal, and hence daring ideals are turned into facts: Strong-faith is a shield against the darts of error, and hence she is the object of the contempt and hatred of heresy. Strong-faith builds the walls of Zion, and casts down the walls of Jericho. Strong-faith smites the Philistines hip and thigh, and makes Israel to dwell in peace. Oh that the night of Little-faith were over, and that the day of glorious faith would come! Soon would our young men see visions, and our old men dream dreams, if faith were more among us. When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith in the earth? At the revival of faith we shall see another Pentecost, with its rushing mighty wind, and its tongues of flame; but during our lack of faith we still abide in weakness, and the enemy will exact upon us. O God, we beseech thee, make thy face to shine upon us, cause our faith to grow exceedingly, and our love to abound yet more and more; then shall there be times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord.

Paul thus fervently gave thanks to God because the blessing came to the church at a remarkably seasonable time. The people of Thessalonica had risen against the church and persecuted it; thus, without were fightings, but within there were no fears; for the brethren were firm in faith and fervent in love. The church was subject to constant tribulation; but its faith grew exceedingly. Has it not often been so with the Lord's people? Times of cloud and rain have been growing times. Pharaoh dealt hardly with Israel; but the more he oppressed them, the more they multiplied. The more the church of God is down-trodden, the more it rises into power and influence. The bush burns and is not consumed; nay, rather, it flourishes in the flame. I say not that this increase of faith is the immediate effect of persecution, but it is singularly the attendant upon it. God knew that when his poor servants were haled to prison, when they were brought before rulers and kings for his name's sake, and when they were

spoiled of their goods, they wanted increased strength, and therefore he gave it to them by growth in faith. As the persecution rose upon them like the deluge, their confidence in God rose above it, like Noah's ark, which rose the higher the deeper the waters became. They stood fast in the day of trial, and became an example to all other churches, whether persecuted or not; and this because their faith grew exceedingly. Beloved, I pray for each member of this church that your confidence in God may rise from ebb to flood. We need it much just now. This is a time of depression in trade, when many are suffering want, and almost all find their means decreased. We need to be rich in faith, for we are growing poor in pocket. Many children of God cannot find employment wherewith to earn their bread. This is, moreover, a time of abounding vice. Perhaps never in our memories were any of us so shocked as we have been of late by the discoveries of unspeakable abominations. We need that our faith should grow exceedingly, for sin runs down our streets in torrents. It is also a period of grievous departure from the faith once delivered to the saints. Looking back to our younger days, we are amazed at the progress of error. We mourned in those days that men trifled with the doctrines of the gospel; but what shall we now say, when men deride those doctrines, and mock at them as antiquated fables? The foundations of the earth are removed, and only here and there will you find a man who beareth up the pillars thereof; therefore do we need that our faith should be exceeding steadfast. I charge you, brethren, to be rooted and grounded in faith, seeing the times are evil! I cannot speak emphatically enough upon the abounding dangers of the times: they demand of us that we be not of doubtful mind, but that we take firm hold of infallible truth, and endure as seeing him who is invisible. He that cannot say, "I believe, and am sure," is one born out of due time.

The apostle's commendation was meet and fit, since, if there be any growth in faith, it is the work of God's Spirit. Faith is the gift of God in its beginnings, and it is equally the gift of God in its increase. If thou hast faith as a grain of mustard seed, God gave it thee; and if thou hast faith as a spreading tree, God has given the increase. The infancy of faith is of God, and so is its perfect manhood. In the natural world we ought as much to admire God's hand in growth as in creation; for, indeed, the outbursting of spring, the advance of summer, and the maturity of autumn, are all a sort of creation, seen in detail. Even thus the progress of faith reveals the same power as the commencement of faith. If thou dost not look to God for more faith, thou wilt never have more faith: great faith in its strong broad current flows as much from the fountainhead of grace as in its first trickling streamlet of hope in Christ. Let God have all the glory of faith from its Alpha to its Omega. If thou be a strong man in Christ Jesus take heed that thou do not sacrifice to thine own net, nor burn incense to thine own drag, and glorify thine own experience as if thou madest thyself strong and rich in the things of God. We are bound to render all the thanksgiving unto God; it is meet that it should be so. Look how the apostle puts it: "We are bound to thank God always for you." I like the modesty of that. He does not so much say that he did thank God, though he did do so; but in deep humility he admits the debt which he

could not fully pay. He did not judge his thanksgivings to be sufficient, but owned that he was still under bonds to render more praise. I rejoice to be bound with these bonds, to be bound to thank God every day, and all the day. I wear these golden fetters and count them my best ornaments. "Bind the sacrifice with cords, even with cords to the horns of the altar." I would be bound over, not to keep the peace, but to keep praise for ever. Let the altar of incense be always burning, yea, flaming higher and higher with the sweet spices of love and gratitude. Blessed be God for what he is doing for his people, when he causes their faith to grow; for it is a blessing so immense, so incalculable, that our praises ought to rise to the height and glory of loud-sounding hallelujahs. Brethren, let us bless God for every good man we know whose faith has grown, for every holy woman whose love in the church is manifest unto all; and when we have done so, let us turn our eye to God, and say, "Lord, make me such a one that others may glorify God in me also; I am as yet sadly weak and undeveloped; make me to grow till all thy image shall be seen in me, and my fellow-Christians shall bless God concerning me." Thus have I set growth in faith before you as a subject for thanksgiving. It is indeed a jewel worth more than both the Indies.

II. In the second place, it is worthy to be AN OBJECT FOR DILIGENT ENDEAVOUR. If you have it not, labour speedily to attain it. As the merchantman seeketh goodly pearls, so seek a growing faith. Covet earnestly the best gifts and the noblest graces. Never be self-satisfied, but cry with Jabez, "Oh that the Lord would bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast."

Why? Because the proof of faith lies in the growth of faith. If thou hast a dead faith, it will always be the same; but if thou hast the faith of God's elect, it must grow. If I heard of a child that was born some years ago, and had never grown, I should begin to guess that my friend was entrapping me, and that the child was dead from the birth. Life in its earliest stages is ever attended with growth. Brother, thou must have more faith, or we shall fear that thou hast no faith; thou must have more love, or else for sure thou hast no love at all. That which does not grow unto God does not live unto God.

We ought to have more faith because God's truth deserves it. It ought to be the easiest thing in the world for us to trust God; to believe every word of the Lord should be an act to which we need not to be exhorted; it should be as natural as for the lungs to heave, or the heart to beat. We ought, as children of God, to believe our Father by instinct, even as young eaglets hide under the mother's wing. We ought to exercise faith even as the eye sees, and the ear hears, because thereunto we were created by the Holy Spirit. It should be a necessity of our spiritual existence, that we must and will trust the Lord Jesus Christ yet more and more. I pray that it may be so; for unbelief is a horrible crime. Have you doubted God? Have you in any sense mistrusted him? Have you limited the Holy One of Israel? Then continue not the slave of such a sin, but give unto God your heart's confidence from this time henceforth, and for ever.

Moreover, we ought to grow in faith, because it will be so much for our own spiritual health, and strength, and joy. Does Little-faith know

what it might be, and do, and enjoy if it could only quit its littleness? There are many ways of being a Christian, as there are many ways of being an Englishman; but all are not equally desirable. I may be an Englishman in banishment, or in the workhouse, or in prison; but I prefer to be an Englishman at home, in health, and at liberty. So you may be a Christian, and be weak, timorous, and sad; but this is not desirable; it is better to be a happy, holy, vigorous, useful Christian. As your being an Englishman does not depend on your health or wealth, so neither does your salvation turn upon the strength or joy of your faith; yet much does depend on it. Why not glorify God on the road to heaven? Why not have foretastes of it now? It is not my desire to go through the world in miserable style, singing always—

"Do I love the Lord or no?
Am I his, or am I not?"

Infinitely do I prefer so to trust God that my peace may be like a river, and my righteousness like the waves of the sea. Look at the difference between Abraham, the Father of the faithful, and his nephew Lot. Lot was righteous, but he was by no means so strong in faith as Abraham, neither was he so great or so happy. Abraham is calm, bold, royal; Lot is greedy, timid, trembling. Lot, in Sodom, is with difficulty made to run for his life, while Abraham alone with God is interceding for others. Lot escapes from a burning city with the loss of all things, while Abraham dwells peacefully with the Lord who is the possessor of heaven and earth. Abraham's faith makes him rise like some lone Alp till he touches the very heaven of God. It is well to be Lot, but it is infinitely better to be Abraham. Do seek the utmost degree of faith; for if this be in you and abound, you shall not be barren or unfruitful. Heaven lies that way. More faith, more rest of heart. To grow heavenly we must grow more believing.

The question is, *How* is this to be done? How is my faith to be made to grow exceedingly? I have already told you that it is the work of the Holy Spirit: but still he uses us for the increase of our own faith. If we are to grow in faith, certain evils are to be avoided with scrupulous care. Avoid continual change of doctrine. If you have a tree in your garden and you transplant it often, it will yield you scanty fruit. Those who are everything by turns, and nothing long, are "ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Unstable as water, they shall not excel. Those brethren who believe this to-day, and that to-morrow, and the other thing the next day, do not believe anything in downright earnest. They cannot grow; they are not rooted and grounded. Like the moon, they are always changing, and what light they have is cold and sickly. He who can change his religion has none to change. Those who prefer philosophy to Christ never knew him.

Then, again, if you had a tree, and did not transplant it, but began to dig away the earth from it, removing the ground in which it stood, you would impoverish it, and prevent its fruitfulness. I know certain professors who are giving up the ground which their souls should grow in. One doctrine after another is forsaken, till nothing is held to be important. They do not believe much now, and they are on the line to believe nothing at all. The experiment of the Frenchman who had just

brought his horse to live on a straw a day when it died, is being repeated among us, faith being literally starved to death. What low diet do some men prescribe for their souls! Marrow and fatness they do not even smell at! How can your faith grow when vital truths are abandoned, or held with feeble grasp? Oh for a band of Puritan believers! Oh for a troop of spiritual Ironsides!

Next, a tree cannot grow if it is shut out from sun, and rain, and dew. Without heavenly influences we must be barren. Plant a little tree right under a great oak so that it is always in the shade, and it cannot grow; clear the big tree away, or the sapling will dwindle to death. Some men's faith cannot grow because it is overshadowed by worldliness, by tolerated sin, by love of riches, by the pride of life, by cares of lower things. The pursuit of Christ crucified must be all-absorbing, or it will be ineffectual. To know what you believe, and to abide steadfast in it, is the way to be robust in faith. Men whose hearts are not in their trades, men who chop and change—these are the men whose names appear in the *Gazette;* are not many spiritual bankruptcies due to the same cause?

There are methods which the spiritual husbandman uses to cause faith to grow. First, faith grows by an increase of *knowledge.* Many persons doubt because they are not instructed. Some doubt whether they shall hold on to the end; they are ignorant of the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints. Some are in despair because they find evil desires arising in their hearts; they do not know the teaching of Scripture as to the two natures and the warfare between flesh and spirit. Many think themselves condemned because they cannot wholly keep the law; they forget that they are justified by faith. A great deal of unbelief vanishes when knowledge, like the morning sun, drives away the mists. Unbelief is an owl of the night, and when the sun arises it hides away in a dark corner. Study the Word of God: give your heart to searching it; seek to get at the inner teaching, and learn the analogy of faith; practise deep sea-fishery, and you will reach those mysterious truths which are the secret riches of the soul. These truths are much despised now; but those who rejoice in them will find their faith growing exceedingly.

Better still than mere knowledge, which alone would puff you up, faith grows by *experience.* When a man has tried and proved a thing, then his confidence in it is largely increased. Take a promise and test it, and then you will say, "I know that is so." When you have tested it again, and again, and again, nobody will be able to shake you, for you will say, "I have tasted and handled of this good word; I have made it my own, and I am not to be driven from it." The experienced Christian is the established Christian. The man who has proved all things is the man who holds fast that which is good. God give grace to increase our faith by knowledge and by experience!

Faith also grows by much *meditation and walking with God.* If you want to believe in a man, you must know him. Half the disputes between Christian people arise from their not knowing one another. There is a hymn of Mr. Sankey's which I venture to alter thus:

> "When we know each other better,
> The mists will roll away."

When we know each other, our suspicions, prejudices, and dislikes will speedily disappear. I am sure it is so with our God. When you walk with him, when your communion with him is close and constant, your faith in him will grow exceedingly. Some of you, I am afraid, do not give five minutes in the day to meditation. You are in too great a hurry for that. In London life men get up in a hurry even as they went to bed in a hurry and slept in a hurry. They swallow their breakfast in a hurry; they have no time to digest it; the bell is ringing at the station, and they must hurry to catch the train; they reach business in a hurry; they hurry through it, and they hurry to get back from it. Men cannot think, for they have barely time to wink their eyes. As to an hour's meditation and reading the Scriptures, and communing with God, many professors nowadays would think they committed robbery against the god of this world if they took half-an-hour out of his service to give it to fellowship with the world to come. If our faith is to grow exceedingly, we must maintain constant intercourse with God.

Another way of increasing faith is by much *prayer*. Pray for faith and pray with faith; thus shall thy soul become firm in its reliance on the promises. It is while we wrestle with the angel that we find out our weakness, as the sinew of our thigh shrinks; but at the same time we prove our God-given strength, since as princes we wrestle with God and prevail. Power from prayer as well as power in prayer is what we want. On our knees we gather strength, till doubting and fearing disappear.

We must be careful to render *obedience to God*. A man cannot trust God while he lives in sin: every act of disobedience weakens confidence in God. Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God; and he that trusts God, obeys God. He that is without faith is without works; and he that is without works is without faith. Do not oppose faith and good works to one another, for there is a blessed relationship between them; and if you abound in obedience your faith shall grow exceedingly.

Again, faith grows by *exercise*. The man who uses the little faith he has will get more faith; but he that says, "I have not enough faith for such and such work," and therefore shrinks back, shall become more and more timid, till at last, like a coward, he runs away. Go forward with thy little faith, and to thy surprise it shall have grown as thou hast advanced. Accomplish much, and then endeavour something more, and something more. I have often used an illustration taken from a person who teaches the art of growing taller. I do not believe in that art: we shall not add a cubit to our stature just yet. But part of this professor's exercise is, that in the morning, when you get up, you are to reach as high as ever you can, and aim a little higher every morning, though it be only the hundredth part of an inch. By that means you are to grow. This is so with faith. Do all you can, and then do a little more; and when you can do that, then do a little more than you can. Always have something in hand that is greater than your present capacity. Grow up to it, and when you have grown up to it, grow more. By many little additions a great house is built. Brick by brick up rose the pyramid. Believe and yet believe. Trust and have further trust. Hope shall become faith,

and faith shall ripen to full assurance and perfect confidence in God Most High.

This, then, brethren, is what I commend to you. May God the Holy Ghost help you all to go from faith to faith.

III. Finally, this growing faith becomes THE CENTRE OF OTHER CHRISTIAN GRACES. "Your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." A firm faith in gospel verities will make us love one another, for each doctrine of truth is an argument for love. If you believe in God as having chosen his people, you will love his elect; if you believe in Christ as having made atonement for his people, you will love his redeemed, and seek their peace. If you believe in the doctrine of regeneration, and know that we must be born again, you will love the regenerate. Whatever doctrine it is that is true, it ministereth toward the love of the heart. I am sure you will find a deep, firm, fervent unity with one another in those that hold the truth in the love of it. If you are not filled with brotherly love, it must be because you are not firmly believing that truth which worketh toward love.

Firmness in the faith ministers toward the unity of the church. The church at Thessalonica did not have a secession, or a split, as some call it: the church at Thessalonica did not divide under the pressure of persecution: they adhered closely to one another, and the more they were hammered, the more they were consolidated. They were welded into one solid mass by the hammer of persecution and the fire of love, and the reason was because they each one held the truth with all firmness. I am always afraid of a church that is made up of mixed elements, when some are Calvinistic, some Arminian, some Baptist and some Pædobaptist. When the minister who holds them together dies, they will disintegrate. When certain reasons that now make them cohere cease to exist, the church will divide like quicksilver, each little bit breaking into smaller bits, and so they will go rolling about in innumerable factions. But given a church that holds the truth firmly, with deep and strong faith, then if the pastor dies, or twenty pastors die, they believe in a Pastor who lives for ever, and whoever comes or does not come, the truth they hold, holds them in living unity. I cannot imagine a greater blessing for you as a church in years to come than for each man and woman to be intelligently established in the truth you have received. Who shall separate the men who are one in Christ by the grip of mighty faith? I commend firm faith to you with all my heart, as the source of love and the means of unity in years to come.

This faith breeds patience in men, and patience assists love. Truth to tell, God's people are, some of them, a singular tribe. A countryman was accustomed to say that if God had not chosen his people before they were born, he would never have done so afterwards. There is truth in that saying. Therefore if a man loves his fellow-Christians as an act of mere nature, he will often feel himself baffled; he will say, "They acted very unkindly to me. Who can love people that are so ill-mannered, so ungrateful?" But when faith is strong, you will say, "What is that to me? I love them for Christ's sake. If I am to have a reward, it shall come from my Lord Christ. As for God's people, I love

them despite their faults; over the head of the mistaken judgments they form of me, I love all my brethren." The way to make men better is not to be always censuring them, but to love them better. The quickest way to win a sinner, is to love him to Christ; the quickest way to sanctify a believer is to love him into purity and holiness. Only faith can do this. May faith, therefore, grow exceedingly; for faith by working patience helps us to bear with others. If there be anything grand, and good, and desirable, anything Christ-like, anything God-like, the way to it is to let your faith grow exceedingly. If this church is to become a missionary church more and more, as I pray God it may, your faith must grow exceedingly. If you are to stand fast as a break-water in these times of departure from the faith once delivered to the saints, your faith must grow exceedingly. If you are to be made a blessing to this wicked city, and shine like a light-house over this sea of London, your faith must grow exceedingly: If God has brought you as a church, together with other churches, to the kingdom for such a time as this; if you are to achieve your destiny, and work for God and glorify his name, your faith must grow exceedingly. The man who is timorous and faint-hearted, let him go home; he is not fit for the day of battle. The age requires heroes. The chicken-hearted are out of their place in this perilous century. You that know what you know, and believe what you believe, whose tramp is that of fearless warriors, you have a high calling; fulfil it. You shall see what God will do for you and with you; and it shall be written in the pages of eternity that at such a time the church grew in its faith, and therefore God used it for his glory. May it be so. May those among us who have no faith be led to Jesus. O believers, try your own faith by speaking to unbelievers as they go away this morning: this afternoon in the Sunday-school, prove your faith by winning your dear children for Christ: try your faith every day in the week by giving sinners no rest until they come to Christ. God bless you each one for his name's sake. Amen.

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GOD OUR CONTINUAL RESORT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 6TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort."—Psalm lxxi. 3.

DAVID in his younger days had been obliged to hide himself away with his followers in the great caverns and rocks of his native land. In the cave of Adullam, by the rocks of the wild goats, he had dwelt amid the sternest surroundings of nature. No doubt he had climbed aloft upon the mountain's side, and then had penetrated into one cave after another, and treated them as chambers of his house of rock. There he had spent both nights and days, looking from on high upon the plains beneath, often seeing his cruel pursuers passing by in eager hunt for him, while he himself was secure in his rocky fastness.

Nothing leaves a clearer impression upon the memory than a residence amidst such scenes. You might live for an age in such a town as this and forget it all. What is there to remember in this labyrinth of bricks and mortar? But when you get into the clear bracing atmosphere of the hills, when you tread their sublime heights, or descend into their mysterious hollows, you cannot forget it. A day of leaping, like the wild goats, from crag to crag, ended by a night amid the dread seclusion of a mountain den, makes a clear mark on the surface of life which can never be erased: a man will carry such memories with him to his grave. This must have been especially the case with a genius so poetic as that of David. I would not hesitate to place the King of Israel among the first masters of song. If you take the whole company of the poets together you cannot find one who did more for devotional poesy than David. All the altars of God in the world have been set alight by flame from David's lamp. When men worship God in any language they quote one or other of the Psalms. What better expressions can they borrow or invent? With such a soul as his, and such an eye, and such a tongue, and such a harp, it was no wonder that, in his riper days, when he had known the soft luxury of palaces, he could not refrain from rehearsing the sublime memories of his earlier and more adventurous days, and drawing inspiration from the wild and sublime

scenery among which he had been reared. The man, as full of grace as of genius, as saturated with the Spirit of God as with the spirit of poetry, could not but in his loftiest songs speak of his God in language culled from the cave: "Be thou to me a rock of habitation, whereunto I may continually resort;" or as some read it, "Be thou to me a rock of repose." The deep quiet of the enormous recesses in the lone rocks was remembered by the Psalmist, and wrought into his prayer. I shall want you to carry the thought of those rocks and those caves with you, because it will form a background for our subject, and help us to illustrate it.

What a gracious heart David must have had, to speak like this of his God! He desired to be upon the most intimate terms with the Lord his God. He wished to dwell not merely *with* God, but *in* God: he cries, "Be thou my strong habitation." Not merely did he long to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever, but he would have the Lord to be his house. He would be surrounded by God, and that not as with a dungeon, in which he was forced to be, but as the habitation of his choice, for his pleasure and rest. He would not merely live in God's world, but within God himself. He would realize the meaning of Moses when he said, "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations." What a man of God he must have been, despite his infirmities and sins! None but a mind in harmony with God as to the great principles of truth and purity would ever have desired such constant intercourse with God as that which is implied in the words, "Whereunto I may continually resort."

The wicked say, "No God"; but David sighed for none but God. The mere pretender would have God on Sabbaths and high days, and in times of trouble; but David would have God all the day, and every day. The formalist is satisfied with a word with God in the morning, and another at night; when he is either hurried or sleepy, he forces from himself the tax of a minute or two in prayer; but he that loves the Lord delights to walk with him evermore, yea, to make his home with God, and to abide in him. Some would like a Sabbath once in the month, but David would make all his days holiness unto the Lord. Many would like to speak with the Lord from a distance, but David would live and move and have his being in his God. By this the man after God's own heart proved that his own heart was after God. Judge yourselves, therefore, at the very outset, as to what your own condition of heart must be. If you can repeat the words of David from your very soul, bless the grace of God that has taught you to do so; and if you cannot so pray, breathe a silent prayer to heaven saying—Lord, teach me to love thee and long for thee. I would fain acquaint myself with thee, and be at peace.

Without inventing any mechanical divisions, I would remark that the text naturally suggests three things. The first is, that God was to David a *delightful repose;* he was his habitation or home. Secondly, that David found in his God *peaceful security*—"Be thou my *strong* habitation." God was his fortress, his castle, his high tower, his rock of defence. And then, thirdly, David had to his God *continual access:* "Whereunto I may continually resort." Those five words are as a musical box, set to the most charming air: they discourse a quiet

harmony to my soul, such as one hears when listening to the brook which warbles as it flows—"Whereunto I may continually resort."

I. Let us dwell on this for a few minutes. David found in his God DELIGHTFUL REPOSE. "Be thou my strong habitation"; that is, be my house and home. David was one of those who had made the Most High his habitation, and therefore did God continually preserve him. He was one of the favoured ones who dwelt in the secret place of the tabernacles of the Most High, abiding under the shadow of the Almighty.

Observe what *wonderful condescension* he had experienced from the Lord! What infinite grace that God should allow his servants to think of him as their house! My God, thou art the glory of heaven, and the angels veil their faces in thy presence, and yet I dare to say, "Be thou my habitation." My God, thou art terrible in righteousness, thou art a consuming fire; all things perish at thy presence when once thou art angry; yet thou dost permit me to dwell in thee, and to find in thee, not destruction, but eternal life. Brethren, we aspire not merely to be reconciled to God, nor even to draw near unto him, but to enter into him, and to hide ourselves beneath him. It is one of the sublimities of Christian experience to be in God the Father, and in Christ Jesus. Do we understand this? We have never reached the sum of our grace-given privileges till we are more at home with God than with any one else in the universe. What a wonder that the eternal God is our refuge! What condescension that the infinite Jehovah should be the abode of his saints!

David had realized in his God *peculiar love.* In a man's own home he expects to find love. Pity on the poor wretch who is disappointed therein. When we are abroad in the world, my brethren, we reckon to meet with rough handling, and to receive scant consideration; but within our own doors we enter the sanctuary of love. If we receive and return love anywhere, it is within the walls of our own habitation. That is how David felt towards the Lord his God. Abroad he had enemies many, and faithless friends not a few, but they were all outside of his real life; when he came to his true life in God he breathed an atmosphere of love; he dwelt in one who loved him better than he loved himself. Do you know what this means, dear brother? Is God the centre of your repose because in him is love? Are your affections all set on him? and do you know that he loves you, and takes a divine delight in you? "He shall rest in his love"; do you rest in it? Oh that your heart may be filled to the brim with a sweet consciousness that you are the object of infinite affection! May you say of the Lord Jesus, "Who loved me, and gave himself for me"; and may you hear the Father say, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, for God is love. Oh blessed experience, to dwell in God as the abode of love!

Moreover, home is the place of *special rest.* At home we are unloaded of the world's huge load; the advocate takes off his gown, and says, "Lie there, Mr. Barrister, and let the father come to the front." The tradesman takes off his apron, the warrior his harness, the bearer his yoke, for he is at home; and if a man may rest anywhere on earth, it

must surely be in his own habitation. Is not our God our rest? O beloved, is there indeed beneath the sun any repose for a poor soul except in God? There remaineth a rest for the people of God, and that rest is God himself. "Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee." When we know Jehovah's truth, his faithfulness, his power, his wisdom, his grace, then we rest in him. When we see him glorified in the majesty of his love in the person of the Well-beloved Saviour, who hath redeemed us from death and hell, then we who have believed do enter into rest. The Lord makes us partakers of his own Sabbatic rest: the peace of God which passeth all understanding keeps our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. Beloved, have you not sweet recollections of times when you had been tossed with tempest, and not comforted, but obtained access to God, and so entered into a deep calm? When wearied and bewildered, the presence of the Lord has brought you perfect peace, and you have felt yourself at home. Then have you sung—

> "Let cares like a wild deluge come,
> And storms of sorrow fall,
> My soul hath safely reached her home,
> Her God, her heaven, her all."

We have not yet read all the meaning that coucheth beneath this sweet word "habitation," or home. Our habitation is the place of *joyful freedom*, and hearty naturalness. One is not stiff and starched at home. You are not guarded there as to what you say or do, for you are not exposed to criticism and misrepresentation. Some of us cannot open our mouths without seeing a reporter's pencil twinkling across his prepared paper. Our steps are dogged by those who take notes and print them. We live under the microscope. We can hardly think without being published, with this addition, that what we do *not* think is often imputed to us. Do not wonder if we walk somewhat under constraint. But at home a man feels, "Well, these dear children, and the dear wife of my love, and these kind friends—I am not afraid of them: they will not misjudge me." Did you ever feel that with relation to God? Are you yourself when alone with him? Are you at ease in his presence? Those fine, stately prayers we sometimes hear, majestic and cold; we find no fault with them except that there is nothing in them to suit rapt devotion, or to express the spirit of adoption. Do you pray after a more living, loving fashion? God's children dare to be familiar with him. God so knows our hearts that it is of no use to be reserved before him; therefore let us unlock our hearts and talk with him as a man talketh with his friend. Are there not a thousand things you could not tell to any but your God? Have you not griefs, ay sins, which it were wrong to reveal to any but to him? O our God, we have not to study our language while with thee! Our soul speaks to thee without words; her thoughts and emotions rise to thee in their pure spirit, without the encumbering embodiment of speech. Our heart leaneth against thy heart, and thou knowest what we mean, even as thou hast made us to know what thou dost mean; for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant."

Religious people sometimes start back from the prayers of a true saint, and say, "He is too familiar." Of course a child is too familiar for the imitation of a stranger; but have you ever blamed a child for clambering his father's knee? And yet you would not think of copying him. Boy, dost thou know what thou art at? Thou art playing with a learned judge, before whom prisoners tremble, and courts are hushed. Even wise counsellors speak to him as, "My lord." That urchin does not say "My lord." Look! He is plucking him by the beard; he is kissing his cheek. What presumption! No! he is the judge's child; he who is judge to others is "father" to him. So the saints of God say, "Our Father which art in heaven," ever reverentially, but yet with sweet familiarity. They are at home with him. Beloved, may you know what that means by the teachings of the Spirit of sonship; for only he can teach us the blessed freedom of being at home with God.

A man's habitation is also the place of his *intimate knowledge*. David knew the Lord even as he knew the caves in which he had sheltered. David could have served as guide to the great hollows of Adullam; and these, in their vastness and sublimity, may be likened to the mysteries of God. There is a weird charm to my mind about caves: I like to visit all that are in my way. One is pleased to pass from one subterranean room to another, and mark the secrets which are revealed by the glare of the torches. Here there is a spring of water, there a grand stalactite; here is an ascending staircase leading to another hollow, and there you must go down by a ladder to a greater depth. This is a fair allegory of the way in which the Spirit of God leads us into all truth. In God, even in Christ Jesus, are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and within these hiding-places we find our habitations. David was so much at home with God that he entered by earnest trust into one attribute after another, and delighted in them all. He knew the Lord. He could say, "My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord." He loved to dwell in the rocky strongholds of eternal love, unchanging grace, almighty wisdom, unspotted holiness, unerring purpose, and infinite power. O brethren, seek to have the same clear knowledge of the Lord as David had, till you can say that you are at home with God, who is your habitation.

Home also has about it the thought of *tender care*. Where are we so lovingly watched over as at home? Where else are there such soft pillows for our aching heads, such gentle words for our wounded spirits? "Take me home," saith the sick child. I had the great sorrow yesterday of speaking to a dear brother whom I had hoped would be spared for great usefulness in a distant land; but he had just received from the doctor's examination the solemn information that he was hopelessly diseased. We proposed that he should go to the seaside; but I saw which way his heart went. He thought of his wife and his habitation, and he said, "Let me go home. If I must die, let it be in my own house." He spoke as I should have done in like case. At home one might not have all the skill of the hospital at command; but one would be sure of a certain priceless tenderness which no nurse can rival. Lord, thou hast been my dwelling-place: I will die in thy arms. When I am sick and weary there is none like thee, my God! When my heart breaks none can bind it up but thee, my God! I turn to thee:

when in my mortal sickness, like Hezekiah, I turn my face to the wall—"Into thy hands I commit my spirit." Yes, my unrest is all over when I get to thee. The ship is in harbour. The bird is in its nest. My heart has found the bosom on which it loves to recline. I have all things, my Lord, when I have thee. Thou sayest, "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

There is much more in this first part of the verse than I can possibly set before you. I have only opened the windows, and I now invite you to look out upon the landscape so full of beauty.

II. Secondly, David had realized in God PEACEFUL SECURITY. "Be thou my strong habitation"—"my rock of habitation." Now, the child of God when he enters into the Lord by faith feels himself perfectly safe. Safe, first, from all risk of the Lord's changing or failing. God himself is strong, his love is immutable, his power is unfailing. This is the solid ground of our security. When the winds are out in all their fury those of us whose habitations stand on the top of a hill know the value of stability. There are periods in the rage of the storm when our habitation shakes like a ship which trembles from stem to stern; and though this is very exciting, it does not create a sense of peaceful security. When once we enter into God, we do not shake or know a fear. Rise winds, roar waves, blow tempests, howl hurricanes, there is no shaking our sure abode in God. David in the rock had often defied the storm; for he felt that though the earth should be removed, and the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea, he would not fear. Such be the confidence of every child of God. God changeth not; God's arm is not shortened; God is not vanquished; no purpose of God shall be defeated; no decree of his shall fail. Rocks may dissolve, but the eternal God changeth not, and his people in him shall have a sure abode.

But David felt also great safety from his enemies. When he climbed the rock, and crept into his cavern, he knew that his enemies could not follow him. Had Saul come with all Israel at his back, David's band could have kept armies at bay. He must often have felt like the eagle when it has flashed upward to its nest on the craggy rock, and from thence looks down upon the hunters. He is almost out of sight, but he can see all the movements of the foe. However long the range of the rifle, the noble bird knows no fear, for he is beyond range. I think I see him sitting there quietly eying the enemy, of whom he knows no dread. Thus may a child of God defy the great adversary. "Let us sing," said Luther, "the forty-sixth Psalm, and defy the devil." The devil's restless nature is fretted by the serenity of the firm believer in God; and let him be fretted. His utmost rage is insufficient to hurt a single hair of the head of a believer. No adversary can carry by storm our impregnable stronghold. Tyre stood a siege of thirteen years, but our fortress has been beleaguered throughout the ages and never captured. Security itself is our portion for time and for eternity, when we trust in the Lord. I love to think of the child of God as getting into God, and resting secure beyond the evil designs of the malicious hand, the crafty mind, and the slanderous tongue. No stone will be left unturned to do us ill, and yet no stone of our rocky habitation shall be dislodged. "No weapon that is formed against thee

shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." The trials of life shall not harm us; the bereavements of death shall not cause us to despair; sickness shall help on our sanctification; poverty shall increase our wealth of experience. When God blesses, nothing curses. If God be for us, who can be against us? Under the shadow of the Almighty we are out of harm's way. In God we dwell on high, and our place of defence is the munitions of rocks. What would be a crushing disaster to us apart from God, now turns to a benediction with God to overrule it. O child of God, trust in God, for he is worthy of all confidence. In him you are secure in every sense. He that keepeth thee doth neither slumber nor sleep; who, then, can do thee ill? Thou art secure from the penalty of sin, for Christ hath put it away from you, bearing the chastisement of your peace. Hidden beneath his atonement you are secure from the wrath of God; your transgression is forgiven, your sin is covered: thus the sting is taken from every evil. You are secure against final overthrow by your own natural and constitutional weaknesses; for the Lord will cleanse your blood which he has not cleansed, he will purge you thoroughly, and cleanse you from all your idols, and write his law upon your inward parts, so that you shall not depart from him. You are secure against all the trials and troubles of providence, since these shall work together for your good. The griefs and pangs of death you need not fear, since God is with you, and will raise you from the grave. The terrors of eternity are not for you; joys immeasurable are your portion. Once safe in God, what is there to fear? "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect"? Who shall "separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"?

A blessed sense of perfect security ought to be enjoyed by every believing man and woman. You ought to be as serene as the glorified, since around you there is a wall of fire, and God is with you as a glory and a defence. The enemies may gather together, but they only gather to be scattered. Those that love God and are the called according to his purpose are beloved of the Lord, and he will interpose his eternal power and Godhead between them and evil. When God is our friend the whole universe is under bond to keep the peace towards us. The beasts of the field are at peace with us, and the stones of the field are in league with us; the stars are our lights, the heavens are our curtains, angels are our servitors, the elements are our providers; time is our rehearsal, and eternity is our anthem of joy. Wherefore, be glad and rejoice in God, and say with the Psalmist, "Be thou my strong habitation."

III. We have now reached our last point, upon which we may be somewhat more lengthy than upon the others. David's God was to him a place of CONTINUAL RESORT. "Whereunto I may continually resort." I was talking the other day with a man of God who has very much service and great care upon him, and as we communed the one with the other he said to me—"that expression of the Psalmist is very sweet to me, 'Whereunto I may continually resort.' It rises frequently before my thoughts." Indeed, I did not wonder; for it is an exceedingly choice expression. Happy are we that the gate of communion with God is never locked! In our pastoral cares, in our business trials, in our family afflictions, in our personal conflicts, there is this saving proviso, that we may always flee unto

God for succour. "Whereunto I may continually resort," said David while the veil was yet unrent: may we not say the same with emphasis to-day, now that we have access to the holiest by the blood of Jesus?

There is joy in this thing in itself. Is it not a great bliss to have the *entrée* of Jehovah's palace day and night? Is it not heaven below to have access without ceasing to Father, Son, and Holy Ghost? How blessed to enter the golden gate unchallenged, and remain unrebuked in the pavilion of the King of kings! O believer, you may come when you will to the throne of grace and never fear a repulse. You may come not only into the King's palace, but what is infinitely more, into the King himself; for he is your habitation, whereunto you may continually resort. The Persian kings forbade any one to come near them; and if any ventured into the king's court, and the monarch did not stretch out the silver sceptre, the guards cut them down at once. Yet there were certain favoured courtiers who, by special privilege, had the right to approach the king at all times, guard or no guard. These were the noblest in the king's dominions. Such honour have all the saints. No cherub with flaming sword guards the way of approach to God against any child of the great Father. You have a privilege that is much greater than any dignity belonging to the mightiest monarchs of earth—the privilege of perpetual intercourse with God, at whatsoever hour you will. It ought to make your heart leap for joy to think of it. Come in the dewy morning, come at dusky night, come in the midnight's dreariest hour, the Lord is ever ready to receive you, and you may speak freely with him. This is his word: "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." "Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." Continual access to the God of all grace is a perpetual fountain of joy.

There is a great comfort in it as an outlook. "Whereunto I may continually resort." Throughout all future time I may draw nigh unto God. The day may come when I shall be sore sick, and be compelled to keep my bed, and then I may resort unto God. I shall not be able to go up to the house of the Lord, but still I may resort to God, who is more than house and home. No form of disease shall shut me out from my heavenly Father. I may lie on my bed and sleep, and when I awake I shall still be with him. Old age steals on apace, and perhaps my feet will not be able to bear me to the place of the assembly; but even then I may resort to God. When my ears shall grow dull of hearing, and I shall not enjoy the preaching of the word, even then I shall hear the still small voice of the Spirit in my heart. When I am so far gone with age that my lone bed will become the best place for me, I shall still enjoy his presence and sing his praise. O brother, fear not the future, for the Lord saith, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

"Should fate command you to the utmost verge of the green earth, rivers unknown to song," yet may you continually resort to God. If you should be a castaway upon the salt sea, the Lord sitteth upon the floods, and you shall resort to him there. If you were like Alexander Selkirk, out of humanity's reach, yet you would not be out of reach of Divinity. Oh no; even in the dreariest solitude you may continually resort to him, whose company is better than that of all mankind. In

death and in eternity this is the perpetual privilege of every believer in Christ: he may still draw nigh unto God.

Now, this continual resorting to God is not only a joy in itself and in its outlook, but *it is a joy which answers so many blessed purposes.* I wish you would read this seventy-first Psalm quietly at home in the light of my text, and then you will see that David found in coming to God everything that he needed.

First, he found an escape from present ills—"Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape." As the cony doth not fight its foe, but hides itself in the rock, so you in your time of trouble need not go forth to conflict, but may resort continually to your God. Stop up the rabbit's burrow, and you might soon take him; keep a believer from his God, and you would soon destroy him; but so long as he can reach his hiding-place no enemy can wreak vengeance on him.

David also looked upon God as the place of his prayer, for he says, "Incline thine ear unto me, and save me." We may always pray, and when our prayer is too weak to rise to heaven, we may expect the Lord to bow his ear to hear our groanings. Prayer is never out of season: it is a tree which yields its fruit every day. Whenever a trouble drives you to your knees, the Lord waiteth to be gracious. There are certain hours during which it is difficult to send a telegram to a friend; but we can at all times speak with God by the telephone of prayer. No grief is too little, no trial too heavy, no hour too early, no moment too late for prayer. "Whereunto I may continually resort." The mercy-seat abides in its place, the veil remains rent, and whosoever hath faith in God may come to the throne of grace whensoever he pleases.

David by resorting to the Lord received upholding. "By thee have I been holden up from the womb. . . . I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge." He had kept his footing in slippery places by keeping close to God. He had surprised his enemies by the way in which he avoided their snares. When he was tempted, he overcame the temptation by resorting to God. When he did not resort to God he fell, as others have done.

David also resorted to God for strength. "Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth." He looked beyond himself to the unfailing power of the Almighty, and expected to be strengthened when infirmities crept over him. Do you want more power for service, more patience for suffering? resort to God. They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Go to the Strong for strength. By prayer and faith gird yourself with omnipotence. When you need renewing, run to him who sustaineth all things. Go and draw water from the well of strength. Let down your bucket; drain it dry; and let it down again; for to this fountain you may "continually resort." If you lack strength, you are not straitened in him; you are straitened in your own bowels. Believe in God, and be strong according to your faith.

See how David went to God continually in holy praise. Every hour is canonical for a man who is ready to praise God. "Let my mouth," he says, "be filled with thy praise, and with thy honour all the day." We may sing unto the Lord even when the voice is cracked and the lungs have failed; we need never be afraid that he will reject our

praises on account of age or infirmity. We may sing to him in any place, from the cellar to the garret. We may sing at our work, and sing in our rest, yea, sing aloud upon our beds.

When we have done singing, and wish for matter for instructive conversation, we shall find abundance of it in the Lord. "My mouth shall show forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day; for I know not the numbers thereof." We shall always find fresh matter in the Lord. No fear, ye preachers, of running dry, if the Lord be your subject. Who can exhaust the Infinite? Who can come to a standstill for want of themes when the Triune God is the object of his continual meditation? O ye servants of the Lord, fill your seed baskets from this granary, whereunto you may continually resort.

David also continually resorted to God for quickening. Notice how he puts it in the twentieth verse: "Thou, which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth." Have any of you got down there? Do you want to rise out of them? Those depths of the earth are not pretty places, but we stumble into them sometimes by careless walking: would you rise from them into newness of life? Then resort to God, and he will bring you up from the lowest deeps. He will raise you from death to life, more fitted for holy service than ever.

The fact is, whatever you want you have only to go to God for it; and whenever you want it, you may go. Whatever your condition, you may still resort to the Lord. If you cannot come as a saint, you may come as a sinner; if you cannot come boldly, you may come tremblingly. When you feel most unfit to resort to God, you may still go to him, for he is your fitness and your physician. When you feel that you dare not go, you may still go to him: "Whereunto I may continually resort."

There is a blessed positiveness about my text. "I may continually resort." I may, I am sure I may. Just now in the courts of law it is the Long Vacation; nothing can be done in Chancery this month, for the poor lawyers must rest; but there is no Long Vacation in the courts of King's Bench above. You may plead your suit and urge your case with God every day in the year. The Lord allows, permits, invites, commands you to plead with him. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

I may continually resort to God; that is to say, he prompts me so to do: his Spirit helps my infirmities; he teaches me how to pray. Is not this sweet? What more can you desire? You know the way, for Christ is the way; that way is always accessible, for Christ is ever with us unto the end of the world. Come, tried believer, ring the night-bell, and call up the great Physician. You have only to call upon him, and he will be with you in an instant; yea, before you call he will answer you. Why, then, do you resort to man so often, and to God so seldom? Why drink so far down the stream, where it is muddy and polluted, when the pure fountain-head may be reached by you? Men will grow weary of you, but you cannot weary God. You may come to the Lord even though conscious of sin and backsliding. You may come to him though your soul is sick and faint. He will restore you while you are yet coming. Or ever you are aware, he can fill you with love

divine. You have but to turn the helm towards the harbour of his love, and the wind will turn too, and you shall be happy in the Lord. Come, then, at once to God in Christ Jesus just as you are. In all your backsliding and coldness of heart come to him for renewal. The Lord has not grown indifferent, nor has he shut his door against petitioners.

You may continually resort to God, for he is never like Baal, on a journey, or asleep; he waits to be gracious; he listens for his people's cry. You may continually resort to him with confidence that you shall not seek his face in vain, for the Lord is never unable to help his people. Whatever the form of their trial he is prompt to come to their rescue. One of old exclaimed, "The Lord was ready to save me." All the day long, and all the night long, and all the year long, in every case, and in every place, the Lord sitteth at receipt of supplication, and holdeth himself in readiness to commune with his people.

Listen to a parable:—A certain young man traded, and in all things he prospered for a while. In all his dealings he was wise and prudent, and none were able to overreach him. The cause of his wisdom was that he had a father, a man of singular knowledge, of great experience, of large wealth, and great influence. His son never entered upon a transaction without consulting his father. Whenever he felt himself at all in difficulty, he hastened to ask counsel of his father. Whenever he needed money to meet a sudden demand, he drew upon his father. Their love to each other was more and more manifest as the one trusted and the other helped. Does anybody wonder that the young man grew rich? But after a while the son grew cold towards his father, and seldom advised with him. There was no quarrel, but the young man was growing independent of his father, and preferred to act upon his own judgment. He failed to ask and to receive substantial help, which would have been freely given; and he fell into great losses, which might readily have been avoided. The young man became weak as others; he was the prey of deceivers; he spent labour and thought and substance upon matters which ended in failure; he grew poorer and poorer, till he trembled on the verge of bankruptcy. Do you wonder? Do you pity him? Do you see in him your own portrait? If so, change it all, and say of your heavenly Father: He is my friend and counsellor, and to him I do continually resort. This will be your wisdom, your strength, your happiness, and your spiritual wealth.

Multiply your approaches to God. Let them become incessant, constant, continual. No man ever resorted to God to excess. It might be possible to spend too much time in the posture of devotion, but you can be in the spirit of prayer and praise all the day long, and yet never run to extravagance. "Pray without ceasing" is the command of our infallible Lord. Towards men there is a limit of resort, but to God there is none. By your continual coming you will not weary the Lord; through your importunity, you will prevail with him. I had a dear friend whose company I esteemed, but on a sudden he did not come to see me. He stayed away; and as I knew he had not ceased to love me, I wondered why. At last I found that the good brother had taken it into his head that he might outrun his welcome: he had read those words of Solomon, "Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee." I admired my friend's prudence, but I

laboured hard to make him see that Solomon knew nothing of *me*, and that I was more wearied when he stopped away than when he came. I hope he made *me* an exception to a very sensible rule. But never get that thought into your head concerning your God. Will you weary my God also? You may weary him by restraining prayer, but never by abounding in supplication. Abide with your God, and cry to him day and night, and let this be the music of your whole life, "Whereunto I may continually resort."

Our immediate practical conclusion is this: If we may continually resort to God, let us go to him at once. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and prayer even now. Here are several thousands of us who profess to have come hither to worship: let us all draw nigh unto God this morning. Let each one hasten to his footstool for himself individually. Forget the vast congregation; forget everything but that which is holy and spiritual, and come unto your God, who at this moment calls you to his footstool. "Alas, I have been so worldly all the week"! This is to be confessed and repented of, but it must not keep you from God now. "But I feel dull and dead." I know it, and the Lord knows it too; but yet you may approach him. You remember what our Lord Jesus said of the Laodicean church—that he would spue it out of his mouth; but what does he say afterwards? "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." He says to the same church, "If any man open the door, I will enter in"—enter into the same church which had so disgusted him—"and will sup with him"—sup with that church of which just now he was so sick. Come, then, ye lukewarm ones, and in coming to Jesus you will cease to be disgusting to him. Come, ye whose spiritual state would make Jesus himself sick. He stands at your door and knocks. Open to him, and he will enter in, and he will have no distaste of you, but he will delight in you. You have returned from your health-resorts; now come to a still healthier resort. Come, see how graciously Jesus can restore your souls, and make you full of his life and joy. He will forget your sins, and instead of his being sick of you, he will make you glad in him, until you shall cry out with the spouse, "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love." Blessed love-sickness!

If you never have come to Jesus before, come, ye chief of sinners, *now*. Come, ye that have but little spiritual feeling; come just as you are, since Jesus from this platform says, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." That God who is the house of his people, sets wide his doors, and writes over them in letters of light, "Whosoever will, let him come." Jesus comes to the door; he beckons to you, and persuades you to enter, saying, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." The Lord enable you to come, for his dear mercy's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm lxxi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—71 (Song I.), 91 (Song II.) 627.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE CROSS OUR GLORY.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 13TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."—Galatians vi. 14.

ALMOST all men have something wherein to glory. Every bird has its own note of song. It is a poor heart that never rejoices: it is a dull packhorse that is altogether without bells. Men usually rejoice in something or other, and many men so rejoice in that which they choose that they become boastful and full of vain glory. It is very sad that men should be ruined by their glory; and yet many are so. Many glory in their shame, and more glory in that which is mere emptiness. Some glory in their physical strength, in which an ox excels them; or in their gold, which is but thick clay; or in their gifts, which are but talents with which they are entrusted. The pounds entrusted to their stewardship are thought by men to belong to themselves, and therefore they rob God of the glory of them. O my hearers, hear ye the voice of wisdom, which crieth, "He that glorieth, let him glory only in the Lord." To live for personal glory is to be dead while we live. Be not so foolish as to perish for a bubble. Many a man has thrown his soul away for a little honour, or for the transient satisfaction of success in trifles. O men, your tendency is to glory in somewhat; your wisdom will be to find a glory worthy of an immortal mind.

The Apostle Paul had a rich choice of things in which he could have gloried. If it had been his mind to have remained among his own people, he might have been one of their most honoured rabbis. He saith in his Epistle to the Philippians, in the third chapter, "If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." He says that he profited in the Jews' religion above many, his equals in his own nation; and he stood high in the esteem of his fellow-professors. But when he was converted to the faith of the Lord Jesus, he said, "What things were gain

to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." As soon as he was converted he forsook all glorying in his former religion and zeal, and cried, "God forbid that I should glory in my birth, my education, my proficiency in Scripture, or my regard to orthodox ritual. God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul might also, if he had so chosen, have gloried in his sufferings for the cross of Christ; for he had been a living martyr, a perpetual self-sacrifice to the cause of the Crucified. He says, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." He was once driven to give a summary of these sufferings to establish his apostleship; but before he did so he wrote, "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly." In his heart he was saying all the while, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The great apostle had yet another reason for glorying, if he had chosen to do so; for he could speak of visions and revelations of the Lord. He says, "I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, . . . caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man . . . how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." He was in danger of being exalted above measure by reason of the abundance of these revelations, and hence he was humbled by a painful thorn in the flesh. Paul, when hard driven by the necessity to maintain his position in the Corinthian church, was forced to mention these things; but he liked not such glorying, he was most at ease when he said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Brethren, notice that Paul does not here say that he gloried in Christ, though he did so with all his heart; but he declares that he gloried most in "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," which in the eyes of men was the very lowest and most inglorious part of the history of the Lord Jesus. He could have gloried in the incarnation: angels sang of it, wise men came from the far East to behold it. Did not the new-born King awake the song from heaven of "Glory to God in the highest"? He might have gloried in the life of Christ: was there ever such another, so benevolent and blameless? He might have gloried in the resurrection of Christ: it is the world's great hope concerning those that are asleep. He might have gloried in our Lord's ascension; for he "led captivity captive," and all his followers glory in his victory. He might have gloried in his Second Advent, and I doubt not that he did; for the Lord shall soon descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, to be admired in all them that

believe. Yet the apostle selected beyond all these that centre of the Christian system, that point which is most assailed by its foes, that focus of the world's derision—the cross; and, putting all else somewhat into the shade, he exclaims, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Learn, then, that the highest glory of our holy religion is the cross. The history of grace begins earlier and goes on later, but in its middle point stands the cross. Of two eternities this is the hinge: of past decrees and future glories this is the pivot. Let us come to the cross this morning, and think of it, till each one of us, in the power of the Spirit of God, shall say, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. First, as the Lord shall help me (for who shall describe the cross without the help of him that did hang upon it?) WHAT DID PAUL MEAN BY THE CROSS? Did he not include under this term, first, the fact of the cross: secondly, the doctrine of the cross: and thirdly, the cross of the doctrine?

I think he meant, first of all, *the fact of the cross*. Our Lord Jesus Christ did really die upon a gibbet, the death of a felon. He was literally put to death upon a tree, accursed in the esteem of men. I beg you to notice how the apostle puts it—"the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." In his epistles he sometimes saith "Christ," at another time "Jesus," frequently "Lord," oftentimes "our Lord"; but here he saith "our Lord Jesus Christ." There is a sort of pomp of words in this full description, as if in contrast to the shame of the cross. The terms are intended in some small measure to express the dignity of him who was put to so ignominious a death. He is Christ the anointed, and Jesus the Saviour; he is the Lord, the Lord of all, and he is "our Lord Jesus Christ." He is not a Lord without subjects, for he is "our Lord"; nor is he a Saviour without saved ones, for he is "our Lord Jesus"; nor has he the anointing for himself alone, for all of us have a share in him as "our Christ": in all he is ours, and was so upon the cross. When they bury a great nobleman, a herald stands at the head of the grave and proclaims his titles. "Here lieth the body of William Duke of this, and Earl of that, and Count of the other; Knight of this order, and commander of the other." Even thus, in deep solemnity, with brevity and fulness, Paul proclaimeth beneath the bitter tree the names and titles of the Saviour of men, and styles him "our Lord Jesus Christ." There are enough words here to give a four-square description of the honour, and dignity, and majesty of him who has both Godhead and manhood, and "bare our sins in his own body on the tree." Be it for ever had in reverent remembrance that he who died upon the cross between two thieves counted it not robbery to be equal with God. By nature he is such that the creed well describes him as "Begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God"; yet he "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant . . . . and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." I declare this fact to you in words, but I think them poor, dumb things; I wish I could speak this matchless truth in fire-flakes! The announcement that the Son of God died upon the cross to save men deserves the accompaniment of angelic trumpets and of the harps of the redeemed.

But, next, I said that Paul gloried in *the doctrine of the cross;* and it was so. What is that doctrine of the cross, of which it is written that it is "to them that perish foolishness, but unto us who are saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God"? In one word, it is the doctrine of the atonement, the doctrine that the Lord Jesus Christ was made sin for us, that Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many, and that God hath set him forth to be the propitiation for our sins. Paul saith, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly": and again, "Now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." The doctrine of the cross is that of sacrifice for sin: Jesus is "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The doctrine is that of a full atonement made, and the utmost ransom paid. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." In Christ upon the cross we see the Just dying for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; the innocent bearing the crimes of the guilty, that they might be forgiven and accepted. That is the doctrine of the cross, of which Paul was never ashamed.

This also is a necessary part of the doctrine: that whosoever believeth in him is justified from all sin; that whosoever trusts in the Lord Jesus Christ is in that moment forgiven, justified, and accepted in the Beloved. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Paul's doctrine was, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy"; and it was his constant teaching that salvation is not of doings, nor of ceremonies, but simply and alone by believing in Jesus. We are to accept by an act of trust that righteousness which is already finished and completed by the death of our blessed Lord upon the cross. He who does not preach atonement by the blood of Jesus does not preach the cross; and he who does not declare justification by faith in Christ Jesus has missed the mark altogether. This is the very bowels of the Christian system. If our ministry shall be without blood it is without life, for "the blood is the life thereof." He that preacheth not justification by faith knows not the doctrine of grace; for the Scripture saith, "Therefore it is of faith that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed." Paul gloried both in the fact of the cross and in the doctrine of the cross.

But the apostle also gloried in *the cross of the doctrine,* for the death of the Son of God upon the cross is the *crux* of Christianity. Here is the difficulty, the stumbling block, and rock of offence. The Jew could not endure a crucified Messiah: he looked for pomp and power. Multitudinous ceremonies and divers washings and sacrifices, were these all to be put away and nothing left but a bleeding Saviour? At the mention of the cross the philosophic Greek thought himself insulted, and vilified the preacher as a fool. In effect he said, "You are not a man of thought and intellect; you are not abreast of the times, but are sticking in the mire of antiquated prophecies. Why not advance with the

discoveries of modern thought?" The apostle, teaching a simple fact which a child might comprehend, found in it the wisdom of God. Christ upon the cross working out the salvation of men was more to him than all the sayings of the sages. As for the Roman, he would give no heed to any glorying in a dead Jew, a crucified Jew! Crushing the world beneath his iron heel, he declared that such romancing should never win him from the gods of his fathers. Paul did not blench before the sharp and practical reply of the conquerors of the world. He trembled not before Nero in his palace. Whether to Greek or Jew, Roman or barbarian, bond or free, he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, but gloried in the cross. Though the testimony that the one all-sufficient atonement was provided on the cross stirs the enmity of man, and provokes opposition, yet Paul was so far from attempting to mitigate that opposition, that he determined to know nothing save Jesus Christ and him crucified. His motto was "We preach Christ crucified." He had the cross for his philosophy, the cross for his tradition, the cross for his gospel, the cross for his glory, and nothing else.

II. But, secondly, WHY DID PAUL GLORY IN THE CROSS? He did not do so because he was in want of a theme; for, as I have shown you, he had a wide field for boasting if he had chosen to occupy it. He gloried in the cross from solemn and deliberate choice. He had counted the cost, he had surveyed the whole range of subjects with eagle eye, and he knew what he did, and why he did it. He was master of the art of thinking. As a metaphysician, none could excel him; as a logical thinker, none could have gone beyond him. He stands almost alone in the early Christian church, as a master mind. Others may have been more poetic, or more simple, but none were more thoughtful or argumentative than he. With decision and firmness Paul sets aside everything else, and definitely declares, throughout his whole life, "I glory in the cross." He does this exclusively, saying, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross." There are many other precious things, but he puts them all upon the shelf in comparison with the cross. He will not even make his chief point any of the great scriptural doctrines, nor even an instructive and godly ordinance. No, the cross is to the front. This constellation is chief in Paul's sky. The choice of the cross he makes devoutly, for although the expression used in our English version may not stand, yet I do not doubt that Paul would have used it, and would have called upon God to witness that he abjured all other ground of glorying save the atoning sacrifice.

> "Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
> Save in the death of Christ, my God;
> All the vain things that charm me most,
> I sacrifice them to his blood."

He would have called God to witness that he knew no ambition save that of bringing glory to the cross of Christ. As I think of this I am ready to say, "Amen" to Paul, and bid you sing that stirring verse—

> "It is the old cross still,
> Hallelujah! hallelujah!
> Its triumphs let us tell,
> Hallelujah! hallelujah!

The grace of God here shone
Through Christ, the blessed Son,
Who did for sin atone;
Hallelujah for the cross!"

Why did Paul thus glory in the cross? You may well desire to know, for there are many nowadays who do not glory in it, but forsake it. Alas that it should be so! but there are ministers who ignore the atonement; they conceal the cross, or say but little about it. You may go through service after service, and scarce hear a mention of the atoning blood; but Paul was always bringing forward the expiation for sin: Paul never tried to explain it away. Oh the number of books that have been written to prove that the cross means an example of self-sacrifice; as if every martyrdom did not mean that. They cannot endure a real substitutionary sacrifice for human guilt, and an effectual purgation of sin by the death of the great substitute. Yet the cross means that or nothing. Paul was very bold: although he knew that this would make him many enemies, you never find him refining and spiritualizing: the cross and the atonement for sin is a plain matter of fact to him. Neither does he attempt to decorate it by adding philosophical theories. No, to him it is the bare, naked cross, all blood-bestained, and despised. In this he glories, and in none of the wisdom of words with which others vexed him. He will have the cross, the cross, and nothing but the cross. He pronounces an anathema on all who propose a rival theme—"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

I take it that this was so, first, because Paul saw in the cross *a vindication of divine justice.* Where else can the justice of God be seen so clearly as in the death of God himself, in the person of his dear Son? If the Lord himself suffers on account of broken law, then is the majesty of the law honoured to the full. Some time ago, a judge in America was called upon to try a prisoner who had been his companion in his early youth. It was a crime for which the penalty was a fine, more or less heavy. The judge did not diminish the fine; the case was clearly a bad one, and he fined the prisoner to the full. Some who knew his former relation to the offender thought him somewhat unkind thus to carry out the law, while others admired his impartiality. All were surprised when the judge quitted the bench and himself paid every farthing of the penalty. He had both shown his respect for the law and his goodwill to the man who had broken it; he exacted the penalty, but he paid it himself. So God hath done in the Person of his dear Son. He has not remitted the punishment, but he has himself endured it. His own Son, who is none other than God himself—for there is an essential union between them—has paid the debt which was incurred by human sin. I love to think of the vindication of divine justice upon the cross; I am never weary of it. Some cannot bear the thought; but to me it seems inevitable that sin must be punished, or else the foundations of society would be removed. If sin becomes a trifle, virtue will be a toy. Society cannot stand if laws are left without penal sanction, or if that sanction is to be a mere empty threat. Men in their own governments every now and then cry out for greater severity. When a certain offence abounds,

and ordinary means fail, they demand exemplary punishment; and it is but natural that they should do so; for deep in the conscience of every man there is the conviction that sin must be punished to secure the general good. Justice must reign, even benevolence demands it. If there could have been salvation without an atonement it would have been a calamity; righteous men, and even benevolent men, might deprecate the setting aside of law in order to save the guilty from the natural result of their crimes.

For my own part I value a just salvation: an unjust salvation would never have satisfied the apprehensions and demands of my conscience. No, let God be just, if the heavens fall; let God carry out the sentence of his law, or the universe will suspect that it was not righteous; and when such a suspicion rules the general mind, all respect for God will be gone. The Lord carries out the decree of his justice even to the bitter end, abating not a jot of its requirements. Brethren, there was an infinite efficacy in the death of such a one as our Lord Jesus Christ to vindicate the law. Though he is man, yet is he also God; and in his passion and death he offered to the justice of God a vindication not at all inferior to the punishment of hell. God is just indeed when Jesus dies upon the cross rather than that God's law should be dishonoured. When our august Lord himself bore the wrath that was due for human sin, it was made evident to all that law is not to be trifled with. We glory in the cross, for there the debt was paid, our sins on Jesus laid.

But we glory because on the cross we have an unexampled *display of God's love.* "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Oh to think of it, that he who was offended takes the nature of the offender, and then bears the penalty due for wanton transgression. He who is infinite, thrice holy, all glorious, for ever to be worshipped, yet stoopeth to be numbered with the transgressors, and to bear the sin of many. The mythology of the gods of high Olympus contains nothing worthy to be mentioned in the same day with this wondrous deed of supreme condescension and infinite love. The ancient Shasters and Vedas have nothing of the kind. The death of Jesus Christ upon the cross cannot be an invention of men; none of the ages have produced aught like it in the poetic dreams of any nation. If we did not hear of it so often, and think of it so little, we should be charmed with it beyond expression. If we now heard of it for the first time, and seriously believed it, I know not what we should not do in our glad surprise; certainly we should fall down and worship the Lord Jesus, and continue to worship him for ever and ever.

I believe again, thirdly, that Paul delighted to preach the cross of Christ as *the removal of all guilt.* He believed that the Lord Jesus on the cross finished transgression, made an end of sin, and brought in everlasting righteousness. He that believeth in Jesus is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses. Since sin was laid on Jesus, God's justice cannot lay it upon the believing sinner. The Lord will never punish twice the same offence. If he accepts a substitute for me, how can he call me to his bar and punish me for that transgression, for which my substitute endured the chastisement? Many a troubled conscience has caught at this and found

deliverance from despair. Wonder not that Paul gloried in Christ, since it is written, "In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory." This is the method of salvation which completely and eternally absolves the sinner, and makes the blackest offender white as snow. Transgression visited upon Christ has ceased to be, so far as the believer is concerned. Doth not faith cry, "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea"? O sirs, there is something to glory in in this, and those who know the sin-removing power of the cross will not be hindered in this glorying by all the powers of earth or hell.

He glories in it, again, as *a marvel of wisdom.* It seemed to him the sum of perfect wisdom and skill. He cried, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" The plan of salvation by vicarious suffering is simple, but sublime. It would have been impossible for human or angelic wisdom to have invented it. Men already so hate it and fight against it that they never would have devised it. God alone out of the treasury of his infinite wisdom brought forth this matchless project of salvation for the guilty through the substitution of the innocent. The more we study it, the more we shall perceive that it is full of teaching. It is only the superficial thinker who regards the cross as a subject soon to be comprehended and exhausted: the most lofty intellects will here find ample room and verge enough. The profoundest minds might lose themselves in considering the splendid diversities of light which compose the pure white light of the cross. Everything of sin and justice, of misery and mercy, of folly and wisdom, of force and tenderness, of rage and pity, on the part of man and God, may be seen here. In the cross may be seen the concentration of eternal thought, the focus of infinite purpose, the outcome of illimitable wisdom. Of God and the cross we may say:

> "Here I behold his inmost heart,
> Where grace and vengeance strangely join;
> Piercing his Son with sharpest smart
> To make the purchased pleasures mine."

I believe that Paul gloried in the cross, again, because it is *the door of hope,* even to the vilest of the vile. The world was very filthy in Paul's time. Roman civilization was of the most brutal and debased kind, and the masses of the people were sunken in vices that are altogether unmentionable. Paul felt that he could go into the darkest places with light in his hand when he spoke of the cross. To tell of pardon bought with the blood of the Son of God is to carry an omnipotent message. The cross uplifts the fallen and delivers the despairing. To-day, my brethren, the world's one and only remedy is the cross. Go, ye thinkers, and get up a mission to the fallen in London, leaving out the cross! Go, now, ye wise men, reclaim the harlots, and win to virtue the degraded by your perfumed philosophies! See what you can do in the slums and alleys without the cross of Christ! Go talk to your titled reprobates, and win them from their abominations by displays of art! You will fail, the most cultivated of you, even to win the rich and educated to anything like purity, unless your themes be drawn from Calvary, and the love which there poured out its heart's blood. This

hammer breaks rocky hearts, but no other will do it. Pity itself stands silent. Compassion bites her lip and inwardly groans, she has nothing to say till she has learned the story of the cross; but, with that on her tongue, she waxes eloquent; with tears she entreats, persuades, prevails. She may but stammer in her speech; like Moses, she may be slow of utterance; but the cross is in her hand, as the rod of the prophet. With this she conquers the Pharaoh of tyrannic sin; with this she divides the Red Sea of guilt; with this she leads the host of God out of the house of bondage into the land of promise which floweth with milk and honey. The cross is the standard of victorious grace. It is the light-house whose cheering ray gleams across the dark waters of despair and cheers the dense midnight of our fallen race, saving from eternal shipwreck, and piloting into everlasting peace.

Again, Paul, I believe, gloried in the cross, as I often do, because it was *the source of rest* to him and to his brethren. I make this confession, and I make it very boldly, that I never knew what rest of heart truly meant till I understood the doctrine of the substitution of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, when I see my Lord bearing away my sins as my scapegoat, or dying for them as my sin-offering, I feel a profound peace of heart and satisfaction of spirit. The cross is all I want for security and joy. Truly, this bed is long enough for a man to stretch himself on it. The cross is a chariot of salvation, wherein we traverse the high road of life without fear. The pillow of atonement heals the head that aches with anguish. Beneath the shadow of the cross I sit down with great delight, and its fruit is sweet unto my taste. I have no impatience even to haste to heaven while resting beneath the cross, for our hymn truly says:

> "Here it is I find my heaven,
> While upon the cross I gaze."

Here is perfect cleansing, and hence a divine security, guarded by the justice of God; and hence a "peace of God, which passeth all understanding." To try to entice me away from the truth of substitution is labour in vain. Seduce me to preach the pretty nothings of modern thought! This child knows much better than to leave the substance for the shadow, the truth for the fancy. I see nothing that can give to my heart a fair exchange for the rest, peace, and unutterable joy which the old-fashioned doctrine of the cross now yields me. Will a man leave bread for husks, and quit the home of his love to dwell in a desolate wilderness? I dare not renounce the truth in order to be thought cultured. I am no more a fool than the most of my contemporaries, and if I could see anything better than the cross I would as willingly grasp it as they; for it is a flattering thing to be thought a man of light and leading; but whither shall I go if I quit the rock of the atoning sacrifice? I cannot go beyond my simple faith that Jesus stood in my stead, and bore my sin, and put my sin away. This I must preach; I know nothing else. God helping me I will never go an inch beyond the cross, for to me all else is vanity and vexation of spirit. Return unto thy rest, O my soul! Where else is there a glimpse of hope for thee but in him who loved thee and gave himself for thee?

I am sure Paul gloried in the cross yet again because he saw it to be *the creator of enthusiasm.* Christianity finds its chief force in the enthusiasm which the Holy Ghost produces; and this comes from the cross. The preaching of the cross is the great weapon of the crusade against evil. In the old times vast crowds came together in desert places, among the hills, or on the moors, at peril of their lives, to hear preaching. Did they come together to hear philosophy? Did they meet at dead of night when the harriers of persecution were hunting them, to listen to pretty moral essays? I trow not. They came to hear of the grace of God manifest in the sacrifice of Jesus to believing hearts. Would your modern gospel create the spirit of the martyrs? Is there anything in it for which a man might go to prison and to death? The modern speculations are not worth a cat's dying for them, much less a man. A something lies within the truth of the cross which sets the soul aglow; it touches the preacher's lips as with a live coal, and fires the hearers' hearts as with flame from the altar of God. We can on this gospel live, and for this gospel die. Atonement by blood, full deliverance from sin, perfect safety in Christ given to the believer, call a man to joy, to gratitude, to consecration, to decision, to patience, to holy living, to all-consuming zeal. Therefore in the doctrine of the cross we glory, neither will we be slow to speak it out with all our might.

III. My time has gone, or else I had intended to have enlarged upon the third head, of which I must now give you the mere outline. One of Paul's great reasons for glorying in the cross was its action upon himself. WHAT WAS ITS EFFECT UPON HIM?

The cross is never without influence. Come where it may, it worketh for life or for death. Wherever there is Christ's cross there are also two other crosses. On either side there is one, and Jesus is in the midst. Two thieves are crucified with Christ; and Paul tells us their names in his case: "the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world." Self and the world are both crucified when Christ's cross appears and is believed in. Beloved, what does Paul mean? Does he not mean just this—that ever since he had seen Christ he looked upon the world as a crucified, hanged up, gibbeted thing, which had no charms for him, whose frown he did not fear, whose love he did not court. The world had no more power over Paul than a criminal hanged upon a cross. What power has a corpse on a gibbet? Such power had the world over Paul. The world despised him, and he could not go after the world if he would, and would not go after it if he could. He was dead to it, and it was dead to him; thus there was a double separation.

How does the cross do this? To be under the dominion of this present evil world is horrible; how does the cross help us to escape? Why, brethren, he that has ever seen the cross looks upon the world's pomp and glory as a vain show. The pride of heraldry and the glitter of honour fade into meanness before the Crucified One. O ye great ones, what are your silks, and your furs, and your jewellery, and your gold, your stars and your garters, to one who has learned to glory in Christ crucified! The old clothes which belong to the hangman are quite as precious. The world's light is darkness when the Sun of Righteousness shines from the tree. What care we for all the kingdoms of the world

and the glory thereof when once we see the thorn-crowned Lord? There is more glory about one nail of the cross than about all the sceptres of all kings. Let the knights of the Golden Fleece meet in chapter, and all the Knights of the Garter stand in their stalls, and what is all their splendour? Their glories wither before the inevitable hour of doom, while the glory of the cross is eternal. Everything of earth grows dull and dim when seen by cross light.

So was it with the world's *approval*. Paul would not ask the world to be pleased with him, since it knew not his Lord, or only knew him to crucify him. Can a Christian be ambitious to be written down as one of the world's foremost men when that world cast out his Lord? They crucified our Master; shall his servants court their love? Such approval would be all distained with blood. They crucified my Master, the Lord of glory; do I want them to smile on me, and say to me, "Reverend Sir" and "Learned Doctor"? No, the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and therefore to be dreaded. Mouths that spit on Jesus shall give me no kisses. Those who hate the doctrine of the atonement hate my life and soul, and I desire not their esteem.

Paul also saw that the world's *wisdom* was absurd. That age talked of being wise and philosophical! Yes, and its philosophy brought it to crucify the Lord of glory. It did not know perfection, nor perceive the beauty of pure unselfishness. To slay the Messiah was the outcome of the culture of the Pharisee, to put to death the greatest teacher of all time was the ripe fruit of Sadducean thought. The cogitations of the present age have performed no greater feat than to deny the doctrine of satisfaction for sin. They have crucified our Lord afresh by their criticisms and their new theologies; and this is all the world's wisdom ever does. Its wisdom lies in scattering doubt, quenching hope, and denying certainty; and therefore the wisdom of the world to us is sheer folly. This century's philosophy will one day be spoken of as an evidence that softening of the brain was very usual among its scientific men. We count the thought of the present moment to be methodical madness, Bedlam out of doors; and those who are furthest gone in it are credulous beyond imagination. God hath poured contempt upon the wise men of this world; their foolish heart is blinded, they grope at noonday.

So, too, the apostle saw the world's *religion* to be nought. It was the world's religion that crucified Christ, the priests were at the bottom of it, the Pharisees urged it on. The church of the nation, the church of many ceremonies, the church which loved the traditions of the elders, the church of phylacteries and broad-bordered garments—it was this church, which, acting by its officers, crucified the Lord. Paul therefore looked with pity upon priests and altars, and upon all the attempts of a Christless world to make up by finery of worship for the absence of the Spirit of God. Once see Christ on the cross, and architecture and fine display become meretricious, tawdry things. The cross calls for worship in spirit and in truth, and the world knows nothing of this.

And so it was with the world's *pursuits*. Some ran after honour, some toiled after learning, others laboured for riches; but to Paul these were all trifles since he had seen Christ on the cross. He that has seen Jesus die will never go into the toy business; he puts away childish things.

A child, a pipe, a little soap, and many pretty bubbles: such is the world. The cross alone can wean us from such play.

And so it was with the world's *pleasures* and with the world's *power*. The world, and everything that belonged to the world, had become as a corpse to Paul, and he was as a corpse to it. See where the corpse swings in chains on the gibbet. What a foul, rotten thing! We cannot endure it! Do not let it hang longer above ground to fill the air with pestilence. Let the dead be buried out of sight. The Christ that died upon the cross now lives in our hearts. The Christ that took human guilt has taken possession of our souls, and henceforth we live only in him, for him, by him. He has engrossed our affections. All our ardours burn for him. God make it to be so with us, that we may glorify God and bless our age.

Paul concludes this epistle by saying, "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." He was a slave, branded with his Master's name. That stamp could never be got out, for it was burned into his heart. Even thus, I trust, the doctrine of the atonement is our settled belief, and faith in it is part of our life. We are rooted and grounded in the unchanging verities. Do not try to convert me to your new views; I am past it. Give me over. You waste your breath. It is done: on this point the wax takes no further impress. I have taken up my standing, and will never quit it. A crucified Christ has taken such possession of my entire nature, spirit, soul, and body, that I am henceforth beyond the reach of opposing arguments. Brethren, sisters, will you enlist under the conquering banner of the cross? Once rolled in the dust and stained in blood, it now leads on the armies of the Lord to victory! Oh that all ministers would preach the true doctrine of the cross! Oh that all Christian people would live under the influence of it, and we should then see brighter days than these! Unto the Crucified be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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"BEHOLD, HE PRAYETH."

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 20TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth."—Acts ix. 11.

THESE words are the hall-mark of genuine conversion. "Behold, he prayeth" is a surer witness of a man's conversion than, "Behold, he singeth," or, "Behold, he readeth the Scripture," or, "Behold, he preacheth." These things may be admirably done by men who are not regenerate; but if, in God's sense of the term, a man really *prays*, we may know of a surety that he has passed from death unto life. True prayer is a sure evidence of spiritual quickening: the Holy Ghost has put spiritual life into the heart of the man who prays; for prayer is the breath of heavenly life. Prayer is the outcome of that sense of need which arises from the new life: a man would not pray to God if he did not feel that he had urgent need of blessings which only the Lord can bestow. While expressing his sense of need, and appealing to God for help, the praying man gives evidence of being at peace with his Lord, and cured of his natural alienation. He who prays trusts, and thus reveals the faith which saves. Some forms of prayer display great faith, but all real prayer is the working of faith, either little or great. Will a man cry to God for mercy if he does not believe in him? Will he plead at the mercy-seat if he does not expect to obtain his desire? Thus, dear friends, prayer of the true kind is a voucher for the existence of spiritual life in its consciousness of need, in its turning towards God, and in its faith in him. Prayer is the autograph of the Holy Ghost upon the renewed heart.

Prayer is also an admirable form of communion with God; and as the carnal mind can have no fellowship with God, it becomes the token of regeneration, the evidence of adoption. He that prays has some knowledge of God, some acquaintance with the great Invisible. The habit of private prayer, and the constant practice of heart-fellowship with the Most High, are the surest indicators of the work of the Holy Spirit upon the heart. When it can be said of a man, "Behold, he prayeth," the seal of the great King is upon him, he bears the endorsement of the

Searcher of hearts. Hence the Lord gave to Ananias this sure indication that Saul of Tarsus was a converted man, by saying to him, "Behold, he prayeth."

In Saul's case, this indication was very specially remarkable: "Behold, he prayeth" had a peculiar meaning in relation to this converted Pharisee. I shall have to show you this at length. It was thought a great wonder that king Saul, of the Old Testament, prophesied. So unexpected and singular was the event that it became a proverb: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" But it was an equal marvel when this more modern Saul was seen to pray. Is Saul of Tarsus among those who pray to Jesus for mercy? The Lord from heaven himself mentions it as a prodigy, he points to it as a thing to be beheld and wondered at, for he says to his servant Ananias, "Behold, he prayeth."

I. We will begin our discourse with the following observation: this expression concerning Saul of Tarsus is remarkable, for IT IMPLIES THAT HE HAD NEVER PRAYED BEFORE. "Behold, he prayeth" could hardly be spoken of one who had been accustomed to pray in former days.

This is very striking, for Saul was a Pharisee, and therefore a man who habitually repeated prayers. Pharisees boasted of the regularity, number, and length of their prayers. Perhaps there had never been a day in Saul's life from the time in which he was conscious in which he had not gone through his prayers. Many devout Jews spent nine hours a day in prayer; for they occupied an hour in actual supplication, and sat still for an hour before and an hour after prayer; and this was done three times a day. Pharisees offered prayer, not only in the temple and in the synagogue, but even at the corners of the streets where they could be seen of men. Whatever the quality of their praying might be, there was plenty of it in quantity. If any fact was in public evidence so that nobody could deny it, it was that Saul of Tarsus had been much in prayer; and therefore it is the more striking that the Lord himself should say to Ananias, concerning this constantly devout Pharisee, "Behold, he prayeth." Behold how the Lord revises the judgments of men. In the opinion of all who knew Saul of Tarsus, the disciple of Gamaliel, he was much given to prayer; but he who searcheth the hearts, and knew Saul well, and knew truthfully what prayer is, here declares that now at length he begins to pray. Despite all his former superfluity of ostentatious devotion, Saul all his life long had never prayed at all; and what his friends would have put down as a great mass of prayer, the Lord here makes nothing of. Until the first broken-hearted confession of sin came from the poor blinded persecutor of Jesus, the Lord considered that he had never prayed. I want to push this fact home upon some who are present with us this morning; I mean those who in a formal manner have always prayed and yet have never spiritually prayed. Your mother taught you a form of prayer; this form you repeated all through your childhood and your youth; at this moment you are most regular in bowing the knee, both morning and evening; and yet no single prayer may ever have risen from your heart to the heart of God. You go constantly to your place of worship, you are diligently observant of every Christian ordinance, you join in the responses, or you bow your head and listen

in silence to the extemporary utterance of your minister, and therefore you suppose that you pray; and yet it may be a vain supposition. If anyone were to say that you had not prayed, you would be very angry; and yet it is possible that such a statement would be strictly true. How much I long that to-day, for the first time, you may in real earnest cry unto the Lord God, and cause him to bear witness that now indeed you pray! You will then think little of all your heartless repetitions of prayers; and you will cry to God for the Holy Spirit who helpeth our infirmities, since we know not what we should pray for as we ought.

I have told you that the Pharisees were noted for their prayers, and therefore it seems the more singular that the Lord should announce that Saul of Tarsus had now begun to pray. Yet it was so: he was now offering his first *real* prayer. That prayer of the Pharisee which we read just now from the eighteenth chapter of Luke, was meant for prayer, but there is not a particle of prayer in it. He did not ask for anything; he did not confess a necessity, nor plead a promise; he did not seek mercy, nor mention propitiation. His formal thanksgiving was stained with proud self-esteem, and it was more the boast of vanity than the request of humility. Much of what is called prayer is the husk, and not the kernel, of prayer. Suppose you take the best form that was ever written, and you go through that in the most orderly style: you may do that, and continue to do it, throughout a life of seventy years, and yet you may never have sought unto God in real earnest. If you prefer to compose your own prayers you may do so throughout life, and you may make prayers which shall be excellent in language, and you may make a new one every morning and every evening; and yet there may not have been a single atom of true supplication in the whole round of pious effusions. What if your first prayer has yet to be prayed? What a solemn suggestion to you who have been nursed in the lap of piety, and wrapped in the garments of religion! I do not wonder that it cuts you to the quick. This heart-searching enquiry ought not to be thrust aside as if it did not concern you. Unless your heart speaks to God, unless your soul comes into spiritual contact with the great Father of Spirits, your form of prayer, whether it be liturgical or extemporaneous, is little worth. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living; and this applies to prayers as well as men.

> "God abhors the sacrifice
> Where not the heart is found."

One sentence of true heart-pleading, such as, "God be merciful to me a sinner," is worth volumes of mere lip-service.

Real prayer must be *spiritual;* and Saul's prayers had not been such before. Words are but the body of devotion: the confession of sin, the longing for mercy, the groaning for grace—these are the soul and spirit of prayer. A man may have repeated the choicest words, and these may have been the outward embodiment of true prayer, because his heart went with them; but, on the other hand, he may have used equally select expressions, and may not have prayed at all; for there may have been in him no stirring of the heart towards God. A man may utter no word whatever, he may sit in absolute silence, and he may be praying most effectually. Moses cried aloud when he said not a

word; and Hannah was heard in the temple when she made no sound, but only her lips moved. I reckon that those prayers which cannot be expressed in language are often the most deep and fervent. When desires are so weighty that they burden our words and even crush them down, then are they most prevalent with God. There is power in that solemn silence which is "frost of the mouth, but thaw of the mind," when the soul flows with strong current in a deep and hidden bed till it reaches the heart of God, and prevails with him. Anyhow, that prayer which is not spiritual is not reckoned of the Lord to be prayer at all; for "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." You may, if you like, praise God with organs, as the English do, or you may pray to God with windmills, as the Tartars do—the things are very much alike, as I believe—but your praising and your praying will not be measured by the heaving of the bellows, nor by the revolution of the sails; they will be measured only by the heart-work which was in them. If the spirit does not commune with God, there has been no prayer; there may have been music and oratory, but there has been no prayer if the spiritual nature has not spoken with the Father of spirits. Notice, then, that we only begin to pray when we begin to live spiritual lives.

Next to this, Saul had never prayed a single *right* prayer of the kind which the Lord can accept. Saul hitherto had not known the Lord Jesus, and therefore he did not know the way of access to the Father through his Son, whom he has appointed Mediator. Saul knew the letter of the truth according to the ceremonial law; but he did not know the spirit of it as it is embodied in Jesus. He had been going about to establish his own righteousness, but he had not submitted himself to the righteousness of Christ; and therefore in his prayer he had not been traversing the road which led to the heart of God. If a man were using his rifle at Wimbledon in a contest for a prize, if he were told, "It is not that target on the right, but this upon the left which must be aimed at," if he would continue to shoot towards the right, even though he should make a centre, yet he would not have scored: inasmuch as that was not the target appointed in the competition, his best shots would count for nothing. When a man does not pray in the Lord's appointed way, nor through Jesus Christ, nor in dependence upon the Holy Spirit, he does not pray at all. However fine his prayer, it is only a splendid sin. If you employ a servant to do a work, and he obstinately persists in doing another thing, he will not earn his wages. However industriously he works at what you have never set him to do, he will receive nothing at your hands. So if you pray to God in a way which God has never ordained, if you refuse to use the name which he has appointed, if you neglect the cultivation of that holy and humble spirit which the Lord will alone accept, you may pray till your tongue cleaves to the roof of your mouth; but in God's judgment you have not prayed at all, and you will not receive anything of the Lord.

It is certain, too, that Saul of Tarsus had never made mention of *the name of Jesus* in his prayers, and therefore God reckons that he had not prayed. He had heard of Jesus, but he had rejected his claims and hated his people. Our heavenly Father never turns a deaf ear to the name of

Jesus when it is honestly pleaded; but he will not hear us if we despise that ever-blessed name. There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved; there is none other name by which we can hopefully approach the mercy-seat. Saul had rejected that name, and had come in his own name, and therefore he had not prayed at all. Suppose a king should make a rule that every petition that was presented to him should bear a certain stamp, which his representative would freely put upon it; then if a man neglected or refused to have his petition thus endorsed, he could not wonder if his petitions were treated as impertinences and returned unanswered. Virtually, such a man has sent in no petition whatever, since he has declined to comply with the regulation without which no petition can be received. Friends, let us see to it that we most humbly and heartily in our prayers plead the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; for the force of prayer lies mainly in our pleading the name and work of the well-beloved Son of God. We must set ourselves on one side, and hide ourselves behind the Lord Jesus; for we and our prayers can only be accepted in the Beloved, through the person, the merit, the sacrifice, the ever living intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have not prayed in the name of Jesus, we have not prayed at all.

Furthermore, I should like you to notice that real prayer cannot come from men whose *characters* are contrary to the mind of God. He whose character contradicts his prayer has not prayed; his life has effectually pleaded against his lips. Saul of Tarsus was opposed to the Son of God; how could he be in favour with God himself? He did not believe the gospel, though the seal of God was on it; how, then, could God receive his prayer? How shall the Lord listen to us if we will not listen to him? How shall God accept us if we will not accept his Son? If we set ourselves in opposition to his gospel, do we not shut the door of mercy in our own faces? While we pretend to be knocking at heaven's gate we are turning the key against ourselves. Saul had been more than an opposer, he had become a persecutor; can persecutors enjoy the favour of God? Can we hope for God's blessing while we are cursing God's people? How can a persecutor pray? Saul of Tarsus was evidently full of hate and cruelty; how could he pray? Love is the element of the children of God, "Every one that loveth is born of God"; but Saul had conceived such an intense disgust against the followers of the Crucified, that he haled them to prison and voted for their death. Brothers, we have no right to persecute any man for his religion or his irreligion; whether he be Catholic, Jew, Turk, or Infidel, we must do nothing wrong towards him, nor rob him of any of his rights, however erroneous his views may be. We are bound to be just and right towards all men as men, whatever their religious convictions, or irreligious notions. Injustice is no friend to truth. We must not fight God's battles with the weapons of ill-will. For us to hate those who are in error, and talk of them with contempt or wish them ill, or do them wrong, is not according to the Spirit of Christ. You cannot cast out Satan by Satan, nor correct error by violence, nor overcome hate by hate. The conquering weapon of the Christian is love; and if Paul had sought to overthrow what he thought to be an error by love, although he had been mistaken, he

would not have been so guilty. Whoever they might be, whether righteous or wicked, men or women, he would compel them to blaspheme the name of Jesus, whom he judged to be an impostor. He seeks to domineer over their consciences, and to oppress them for their belief; how, then, can God hear his prayer? If you have the spirit of hate in you, it nullifies your devotions, and makes your prayer to be no prayer. In love lies the essence of prayer; and prayer ought to be the flower and crown of love. If I go through the world hating my fellow-men because they differ from me, and determining to force my own doctrines upon others with an iron hand, I cannot lift that hand in prayer. A malicious heart pollutes the sacrifice which it offers. When I come before God in prayer, I may be really offending him when I dream that I am pleasing him. Friend, if you are living an ungodly life, I do not care how regularly you bend your knee in seeming devotion, there is nothing in it. If you are not living as a Christian should do, your prayers prove nothing; your matins and your vespers, your family prayers and your prayer-meetings are the mimicry of prayer, and nothing more. You may have been baptized, and you may have frequented the communion, but it is all mockery, the caricature of godliness, and nothing more, unless you strive after holiness, and labour to conform your life to the will of God. God will hear *us* when we hear *him;* he will do our will when we do his will; but persistence in known sin, and especially indulgence in enmity and hatred, are so destructive to prayer, that till we are free from them we do not pray. Be at peace with all men, or talk not of prayer; lay aside all opposition to the gospel of the Lord Jesus or you can no more pray than a fiend of the pit.

Yet again: Saul with all his prayers had never truly prayed, because *humility* was absent from his devotions. What a test this is! Saul had gone about the world feeling that he was a righteous man. Did he not wear texts of Scripture between his eyes? What a pious man he was! Had he not broad borders to his garments—borders of blue? What a saint he was! Did he not fast thrice in the week, and pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin? There was not a better man in all the dominions of Cæsar than this Saul in his own judgment. When he prayed, there was a high flavour of self-righteousness in his religious exercises, and this made them disgusting to the Most High. The Lord delights in humble and contrite spirits, but the proud he knoweth afar off. There was no confession of sin, no crying for mercy through a propitiation; his prayer was the expression of thankfulness that Saul of Tarsus was a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as touching the law blameless. In the courts above, where outward appearances are nothing, and God looketh at the heart, his pious harangues were not reckoned to be prayers at all. If you feel quite content with your own prayers, permit me to suggest that you do not pray, for few who pray aright are ever content with their own petitions. Those who dream themselves to belong to the Good-enough family will find themselves bad enough, and the Too-goods will find themselves shut out of heaven. If you have a righteousness made out of your prayers, throw it to the dogs. Self-righteousness is a leaven which the Lord commands us to put away, for he abhors it, and considers that it

pollutes his passover. If you pray as a deserving person, pleading your own good deeds, there is such a lie at the bottom of your prayers that you have not prayed at all.

I say again, this makes terrible work of a great many persons who have been brought up in outward religion. Dear friend, be not vexed or angry if this should seem to come home to you. If before your eyes the whole heap upon your threshing-floor should be blown away like chaff, thank God that it has been blown away so soon, while there is time to gather the true wheat. It is better for you to make the sad discovery now than to make it when you come to die, or to wake up in another world where there will be no hope of rectifying the error. Do let this thought come to every professor of religion this morning, that you may have been a praying man for years, you may have come like Saul of Tarsus to the fulness of your age, and have abounded in the appearance of devotion, and yet you may have to pray to God for the first time.

II. This brings me to my second reflection, and that is, IT IS IMPLIED IN THE TEXT THAT IT WAS A REMARKABLE THING FOR SUCH A PERSON NOW TO PRAY. It is put with an *ecce*, a mark of admiration, "Behold, he prayeth!" It is a very difficult thing, a very marvellous thing, for a man truly to pray who has been all his lifetime praying in a false way. It is a miracle of grace to bring a proud Pharisee to plead for mercy like a penitent publican. It is not half so wonderful that an irreligious man should begin to pray as that a vain-glorious professor should begin to pray. The most remarkable conversion that could take place here to-day would not be that of Elymas the sorcerer, but of Saul the Pharisee. The most remarkable conversion in the apostolic age was that of a man who from his youth up had been plunged in self-righteousness, and in the self-content which comes of attention to ritual, and ceremony, and the form of godliness. "Behold *he* prayeth."

It is hard for him to pray, because he is a person who has been a formalist for a long time, is so rooted in the *habit* of formal devotion, and so contented with it, that it is extremely difficult to bring him to attend to spiritual things. The letter kills in more senses than one; and the man so killed has no life for the things of the spirit. If he goes up to his chamber at the hour of prayer, he runs along the old trams without the least feeling and heart. He repeats the words, but he might as well be reading an unknown language. The tendency is to say the same thing over and over again till the lips move mechanically, and the soul is in a deep slumber. The Bible is read, but the mind is dozing: the sermon is heard, but the heart is wandering; where is the good of this? Yet how hard it is to get men out of it! It is easier to attend a thousand masses, or to go to church every day in the week, than to offer one true prayer. It is very difficult for you who are rich in nominal devotion to enter the kingdom of heaven. It is hard to get the robe of Christ's righteousness upon that man's back who believes that his own coat is as good as it needs to be: he has worn his own rags so long that they cling to him. He is too proud to beg, for he has so long lived like a gentleman on his own income. He has been so long rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing, and he has grown so used to his way of external and superficial religion, that you cannot get

him, without a miracle of grace, to seek after that which is deep and true.

Again, *self-righteousness* is a very great hindrance to coming to Christ in prayer. In Christ's day, the publicans and harlots entered the kingdom before the Pharisees, who were self-righteous. It is a great thing to conquer sinful self, but it is a greater thing to overcome righteous self. The man who is downright bad and feels it, asks for mercy; but these people are bad at heart, and do *not* feel it; therefore they will not seek the Lord. They think that they have done everything they ought to have done: wrapping themselves about in their shoddy righteousness, they imagine themselves to be quite fit to enter into the royal feast without putting on the wedding-garment of the king's providing. It costs a self-righteous man a great effort to stoop to prayer. If he did but know that his righteousness is only a part of his filthiness, he would change his note. The Scripture saith, "All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." When we see them to be such, we are glad to be rid of them, for they are loathsome in themselves, and the foul disease of pride poisons every thread.

The man that has been accustomed to pray without his heart, and to be pious without being converted, is very hard to be made to pray, because he is *prejudiced* against the way of grace. He has made up his mind that he will not see the light of God, because he believes in his own light. You talk to him about salvation by grace, redemption by the precious blood, and justification by faith alone, but he cannot endure such themes; they may suit the wicked, but he is of another breed. He is overshadowed with the glory of his own self, and therefore he cannot see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The habit of superficial external religion once formed is as hard to break as for the Ethiopian to change his skin. A man hugs his self-righteousnes as he hugs his life. Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath, will he give for his legal life, the life of self.

Besides, a self-righteous man knows that everybody thinks him to be right, and therefore he cannot demean himself by such prayers and confessions as might suit a common sinner. If you talk to him about being converted, why, dear sir, he needs no conversion. He was born good. He has always been a Christian; he needs no change; you don't know what a fine gentleman he is! He never cries, in the bitterness of his soul, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Why should he? His mother and father were extremely good people, and he was born again at the font, and has since been confirmed. What do you want more? Washed in the blood of Jesus! Well, perhaps he needs this as others do; but there is no special sin in him, nothing certainly for which he could be condemned. Persons who are of this order are seldom brought to pray. They may be called reprobate silver, for the Lord has rejected them. If ever such as these are saved, it will astonish men and angels, and the Lord himself will cry, "Behold, he prayeth."

Even religious intensity and fervour may become a hindrance to a man's conversion when that ardour is for a false faith. The earnest formalist is cased in steel, and the arrows of the gospel glance from him. Some worship every nail of the church door, and every tile of the chancel; if such a thing as a priest should cross the road,

they are ready to kiss the ground he treads upon. How can these be brought to the simplicity of the faith? Among Dissenters are there not persons who are obstinate for trifles, conservative for old methods, hide-bound with habit, ferocious for externals, and yet devoid of spiritual life? Those who have none of the inward and spiritual grace are often the more fierce for the outward and visible sign. The man who has no money is a great stickler for a respectable appearance, the fact being that if he does not keep that up, he will soon be in the *Gazette*. A sincerely gracious Christian is tempted rather to think too little of externals than too much of them; he sets the highest value upon the inner life, and faith in the Lord Jesus. I say again, brethren, it is such a wonderful thing that the externally-religious man ever should begin to pray in earnest that it is recorded as a wonder. "Behold, he prayeth."

See what was needed in Saul's case to make him pray—the Lord Jesus must himself appear and bring him to his knees. Nothing less than a light shining from heaven could show him his vileness. Oh that such a light would break upon all self-righteous souls! The proud man must fall to the earth, cast down from his high places; until he lies low he will still glory in his flesh. He must be struck with blindness, that he may be ready to accept the sight of faith. Three days he must neither eat nor drink, to wean him from earth and make him feed on the bread of heaven. Great must be the agony of his spirit, for he that has been so intensely self-righteous cannot be brought to Christ without a wrench. He that has rested in himself so completely and so long needs to be torn up by the roots ere he will quit his carnal confidences. It takes, as it were, a special interposition of grace to bring a religious professor to pray in spirit and in truth.

III. And now I want you to notice, in the third place, that albeit it was a great wonder that Saul prayed, yet IT IS DIVINELY DECLARED IN THE TEXT THAT HE DID PRAY.

One would have liked to have heard Saul of Tarsus pray. See him now! This fine, good man! How humble, how lowly he is! His prayer began with a full and grievous confession of sin. He offered neither excuse nor extenuation. He looked to him whom he had pierced, and mourned for him. He owned that he was the chief of sinners—"because I persecuted the church of God." The only thing he could say by way of apology was, "I did it ignorantly, in unbelief." See there, alone in his chamber, with his eyes opened and yet blinded, he weeps, and cries, and groans, and humbles himself before the Lord. Indeed he prays. The other day as he rode along to Damascus everybody looked upon him as a saint, but now by his own confession he is a sinner of the blackest sort. Hear how he defames himself. He repents in dust and ashes. He prays for mercy; he begs to be forgiven his scarlet sins. He owns that if he were sent to hell it would be no more than just; but he begs that for the Saviour's sake he may be spared and permitted to see the light of God's countenance. I think I hear him making this sad confession. Behold, he prayeth now!

Now you will find him acknowledging his great need. Why, he says, "Lord, I need everything. It is not one thing that I am devoid of, but everything is gone that is worth having. I need a new heart and a

right spirit: I need truth in the hidden parts, and that in the inward parts I may be made to know wisdom." He had nothing to boast of: he had turned from a boastful millionaire into a beggar. He would cry, "Lord, give me my sight again, but specially grant me my spiritual sight. Take away the scales from my heart as well as from my eyes. Help me to see Jesus as my Saviour! Help me to live to his glory, as before I have lived to persecute him." He did pray this time, and none could doubt it.

I think I can see mingled with that prayer the lowliest adoration. How he would worship Jesus of Nazareth as his God now that he was conquered by him! How he would cry, "My Lord, my Lord, have I been persecuting thee? Art thou the Messiah whom all the twelve tribes expected, and have I rejected thee? Did I sit to see thy servant Stephen stoned, and keep the garments of those that stoned him, and I have been breathing out threatenings against thee, my Lord?" Surely the deep homage of his chastened spirit must have come up sweetly before the exalted Lord as Saul bowed himself in the dust before him, and said again and again, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Behold, he prayeth!"

Consider what pleas he had. Did it ever strike you how Saul must have pleaded. Pleading is the truest and strongest part of prayer. Now, how did Saul of Tarsus plead? Assuredly he urged the promise, "Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon nim, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." He knew the Old Testament Scriptures better than we do, and he would be sure to use them in his prayer. I hear him crying, "O Lord, thou hast said, 'Come, now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'" Surely, he also went over that fifty-first Psalm, every bit of it; it suited him exactly. "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness." Do you not think that when he had gone over those promises he would then plead the types of the ceremonial law concerning Christ? How the fifty-third of Isaiah must have flashed in on his mind! He was blinded; but what a light must have flamed up in his spirit as he saw the Man of sorrows the acquaintance of grief, and heard the prophet say, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. . . . The chastisement of our peace was upon him." How Saul would begin to cry to Jesus, "Oh, Son of God, be my scapegoat, be my sin-offering, be my morning and evening sacrifice! Be to me the blood of sprinkling, and the paschal Lamb!" Knowing, as he did, all the types of the Jewish law, he must have found them rich in comfort now that, in beholding Jesus, he had found the key of them all.

And, beloved, all this must have been steeped in a wonderful fervour. If we could have stood outside the door and listened, we should have understood why the Lord said, "Behold, he prayeth." Before, you might have heard him repeating words, but now he uttered groans, and cries, and sobs, and tears. Before, you might have said to yourself, "He is saying his prayers," but this time it was as when a man

wrestleth for his life, and is in bitterness for his only son. All previous prayer was sham, but this was real; all the rest was but a performance, but now he did real business with the Most High. "Behold, he prayeth." Now he is a real Israel, and lo, he comes off more than conqueror through him that has taught him to pray.

IV. Lastly, we see that as soon as he did pray, IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THE LORD ACCEPTED HIS PRAYER. How do I know this from the text, "Behold, he prayeth"? Well, I know it from the text first, because here is God *bearing witnsss* that he did pray. Might not the Lord stand in a prayer-meeting and hear a dozen of us talk our piece, and never say, "Behold, he prayeth?" But if a voice from heaven were to say concerning some one, "Behold, he prayeth," we should know that the man was accepted of the Lord. So was it with Saul. The first time he prayed, God heard him. Try it, my friend, try it: if this is your first prayer this morning, breathe it to God with humble faith and he will hear you.

We know that God had accepted this first prayer, for he was *about to answer it.* He had Ananias in readiness to go and comfort the poor blinded penitent. God is about to answer your prayer, my dear brother, this morning if you have cried to him. Perhaps the man is present in the Tabernacle who will speak to you before you leave these walls, or somebody will soon call to tell you the way of peace more perfectly. If now you quit the way of self-righteousness and formal devotion, and begin to cry out for the living God, that God will meet you.

Moreover, we are sure that God accepted this first prayer because he *called attention to it* by a "Behold." It is as if God said to angels, to men, to everybody, "Behold, he prayeth." We have heard of the seven wonders of the world, and of other marvels concerning which men cry, "Behold"; but that which strikes God most is a praying man, a sinner praying. God does not say, "Behold Herod on his throne," or "Behold Cæsar in his palace"; but he does say, "Behold, he prayeth," as if he would make the praying man the centre of observation, the focus of regard. "Behold, he prayeth." The heart of God is delighted with true prayer. The arch-enemy notices true prayer, and trembles when a man falls on his knees. And God would have all his saints on earth, and his saints in heaven, look down upon a man in prayer. To the great Father's heart it is a prodigal returning. He cries, "Behold, he prayeth"; but he means, "Behold, he is coming home! Behold, he seeketh his father's face! Behold, I have found my son which I had lost!" Prayer is God's delight, God's admiration.

Beloved, has this ever been the case with you, that you could draw the attention of the great God to yourself? I am afraid there are many of whom it would have to be said, "Behold, he never prays!" What a sight upon earth!—a man created by his Maker who never worships his Creator, a man who is daily fed by God's bounty, and never worships him! Sir, you are a monster, you are a creature among men most loathsome. A man that lives without prayer ought not to live. It is a wonder that the earth does not open her mouth and swallow up such a wretch. And yet when he does pray, God makes a wonder of it.

It is his first prayer this morning. I see him: the sermon is over, and

he has reached home. He has gone up to his room ; he is afraid somebody will come in and disturb him ; he is turning the key. He is kneeling by the side of that bed on which he has slept so often without prayer, and he cries, "O God, I do not know what to say, but be merciful to me a sinner, and forgive my sins." I hear the rustling wings of angels as they gather around the sacred spot. Anon they fly upward, crying, "Behold, he prayeth." Years shall pass on with you, young man, and you shall come to middle life and be exposed to sharp temptation ; what will you do then ? Good spirits watch you, fearing lest you should go astray, and devils watch for your halting. You will then remember that day in the middle of September, when you first prayed ; and you will say to yourself, "I will again cry unto God, as I have often done." You go upstairs, and say, "Lord, many days have passed since first I cried to thee, and I have not ceased to cry ; but now I am in special trouble. I beseech thee, deliver me!" God will help you. The great wheel of providence will revolve for you. Meanwhile, both angels and devils have spied you out : the angels sing and the devils mutter, "Behold, he prayeth."

A few years have passed ; the young man has grown old, and the time is come that he must die. He has gone up to the same room for the last time, and there are those about him who weep and watch. Mark the sweet serenity of the departing soul! He is looking into eternity without fear. He knows whom he has believed, and he is ready to depart. What is he doing in his expiring moments ? "Behold, he prayeth." Prayer, which has long been his vital breath and native air, is now

> "His watchword at the gates of death ;
> He enters heaven with prayer."

Demons that gather about our last hour shall flee away as bats fly out of a cavern scared by a torch : they shall flee when they hear the voice, "Behold, he prayeth." The shining ones shall gladly meet the soul that is on Jordan's bank when they hear the voice, "Behold, he prayeth." They shall meet the praying spirit on the hither side of the river, and shall smile while the prayer of earth melts into the praise of heaven. Soon shall we be for ever with the Lord. God grant it may be so, for his name's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Luke xviii. 1—14 ; Acts ix. 1—22.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—138, 977, 98.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE LOWLY KING.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON THURSDAY EVENING, JUNE 25TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."—Zechariah ix. 9.

I DO not intend to expound the whole text at any length, but simply to dwell upon *the lowliness of Jesus*. Yet this much I may say: whenever God would have his people especially glad, it is always in himself. If it be written, "Rejoice greatly," then the reason is, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee!" Our chief source of rejoicing is the presence of King Jesus in the midst of us. Whether it be his first or his second advent, his very shadow is delight. His footfall is music to our ear.

That delight springs much from the fact that he is ours. "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion: . . . behold, *thy* King cometh unto thee." Whatever he may be to others, he is thy King, and to whomsoever he may or may not come, he cometh *unto thee*. He comes for thy deliverance, thine honour, thy consummated bliss. He keeps thy company: he makes thy house his palace, thy love his solace, thy nature his home. He who is thy King by hereditary right, by his choice of thee, by his redemption of thee, and by thy willing choice of him, is coming to thee; therefore do thou shout for joy.

The verse goes on to show why the Lord our King is such a source of gladness: "He is just, and having salvation." He blends righteousness and mercy; justice to the ungodly, and favour to his saints. He has worked out the stern problem—how can God be just, and yet save the sinful? He is just in his own personal character, just as having borne the penalty of sin, and just as cleared from the sin which he voluntarily took upon him. Having endured the terrible ordeal, he is saved, and his people are saved in him. He is to be saluted with hosannas, which signify, "Save, Lord"; for where he comes he brings victory and consequent salvation with him. He routs the enemies of his people, breaks for them the serpent's head, and leads their captivity captive. We admire the justice which marks his reign, and the salvation

which attends his sway; and in both respects we cry, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"!

Moreover, it is written of him that he is lowly, which cannot be said of many kings and princes of the earth; nor would they care to have it said of them. Thy King, O daughter of Jerusalem, loves to have his lowliness published by thee with exceeding joy. His outward state betokens the humility and gentleness of his character. He appears to be what he really is: he conceals nothing from his chosen. In the height of his grandeur he is not like the proud monarchs of earth. The patient ass he prefers to the noble charger; and he is more at home with the common people than with the great. In his grandest pageant, in his capital city, he was still consistent with his meek and lowly character, for he came "riding upon an ass." He rode through Jerusalem in state; but what lowliness marked the spectacle! It was an extemporized procession, which owed nothing to Garter-king-at-arms, but everything to the spontaneous love of friends. An ass was brought, and its foal, and his disciples sat him thereon. Instead of courtiers in their robes, he was surrounded by common peasants and fishermen, and children of the streets of Jerusalem: the humblest of men and the youngest of the race shouted his praises. Boughs of trees and garments of friends strewed the road, instead of choice flowers and costly tapestries: it was the pomp of spontaneous love, not the stereotyped pageantry which power exacts of fear. With half an eye every one can see that this King is of another sort from common princes, and his dignity of another kind from that which tramples on the poor. According to the narrative, as well as the prophecy, there would seem to have been two beasts in the procession. I conceive that our Lord rode on the foal, for it was essential that he should mount a beast which had never been used before. God is not a sharer with men; that which is consecrated to his peculiar service must not have been aforetime devoted to lower uses. Jesus rides a colt whereon never man sat. But why was the mother there? Did not Jesus say of both ass and foal, "Loose them, and bring them unto me"? This appears to me to be a token of his tenderness: he would not needlessly sever the mother from her foal. I like to see a farmer's kindness when he allows the foal to follow when the mare is ploughing or labouring; and I admire the same thoughtfulness in our Lord. He careth for cattle, yea, even for an ass and her foal. He would not even cause a poor beast a needless pang by taking away its young; and so in that procession the beast of the field took its part joyfully, in token of a better age in which all creatures shall be delivered from bondage, and shall share the blessings of his unsuffering reign. Our Lord herein taught his disciples to cultivate delicacy, not only towards each other, but towards the whole creation. I like to see in Christian people a reverence towards life, a tenderness towards all God's creatures. There is much of deep truth in those lines of "The Ancient Mariner":—

> "He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small."

Under the old law this tenderness was inculcated by those precepts which forbade the taking of the mother-bird with her young, and the

seething of a kid in its mother's milk. Why were these things forbidden? There would seem to be no harm in either of these practices, but God would have his people tender-hearted, sensitive, and delicate in their handling of all things. A Christian should have nothing of the savage about him; but everything that is considerate and kind. Our Lord rode through the streets of Jerusalem with an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass; for he is lowly in heart, and gentle to all. His is no mission of crushing power, and selfish aggrandisement; he comes to bless all things that be, and to make the world once more a Paradise, wherein none shall be oppressed. Blessed Saviour, when we think of the sufferings of thy creatures, both men and beasts, we pray thee to hasten thy second advent, and begin thy gentle reign!

Now, this riding of Christ upon an ass is remarkable, if you remember that no pretender to be a prophet, or a divine messenger, has imitated it. Ask the Jew whether he expects the Messiah to ride thus through the streets of Jerusalem. He will probably answer "No." If he does not, you may ask him the further question, whether there has appeared in his nation anyone who, professing to be the Messiah, has, at any time, come to the daughter of Jerusalem "riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." It is rather singular that no false Messiah has copied this lowly style of the Son of David. When Sapor, the great Persian, jested with a Jew about his Messiah riding upon an ass, he said to him, "I will send him one of my horses": to which the Rabbi replied, "You cannot send him a horse that will be good enough, for that ass is to be of a hundred colours." By that idle tradition the Rabbi showed that he had not caught the idea of the prophet at all, since he could not believe in Messiah's lowliness displayed by his riding upon a common ass. The rabbinical mind must needs make simplicity mysterious, and turn lowliness into another form of pomp. The very pith of the matter is that our Lord gave himself no grand airs, but was natural, unaffected, and free from all vain-glory. His greatest pomp went no further than riding through Jerusalem upon a colt the foal of an ass. The Mohammedan turns round with a sneer, and says to the Christian, "Your Master was the rider on an ass; our Mohammed was the rider on a camel; and the camel is by far the superior beast." Just so; and that is where the Mohammedan fails to grasp the prophetic thought: he looks for strength and honour, but Jesus triumphs by weakness and lowliness. How little real glory is to be found in the grandeur and display which princes of this world affect! There is far more true glory in condescension than in display. Our Lord's riding on an ass and its foal was meant to show us how lowly our Saviour is, and what tenderness there is in that lowliness. When he is proclaimed King in his great Father's capital, and rides in triumph through the streets, he sits upon no prancing charger, such as warriors choose for their triumphs, but he sits upon a borrowed ass, whose mother walks by its side. His poverty was seen, for of all the cattle on a thousand hills he owned not one; and yet we see his more than royal wealth, for he did but say, "The Lord hath need of them," and straightway their owner yielded them up. No forced contributions supply the revenue of this prince; but his people are willing in the day of his power. He is thy King, O Zion! Shout, to think that thou hast such a Lord! Where

the sceptre is love, and the crown is lowliness, the homage should be peculiarly bright with rejoicing. None shall groan beneath such a sway; but the people shall willingly offer themselves; they shall find their liberty in his service, their rest in obedience to him, their honour in his glory.

Now, my brethren, you may forget the hosannas of that day of Palms, for I beg you to confine your thoughts to the consideration of the lowliness of our divine Lord and Master. "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee . . . lowly, and riding upon an ass."

Let us think for a few minutes upon *the displays of the lowliness* of our Lord Jesus Christ; then upon *the causes of that lowliness;* and thirdly, upon *certain lessons to be learnt from that lowliness.*

I. First, then, let us think of THE DISPLAYS OF LOWLINESS MADE BY OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST. You do not need me to remind you how devoutly we worship him as God over all, blessed for ever. Yet while on earth he veiled his Godhead, and laid bare his lowliness. His sojourn here below was full of the truest greatness; but it was a grandeur, not of loftiness, but of lowliness; not of glory, but of humiliation. Our Lord was never more glorious in the deepest sense than in his humiliation: because of it "he shall be exalted, and extolled, and shall be very high."

First, think of the lowliness of Christ in even *undertaking the salvation of guilty men.* Man without sin, as God first made him, is certainly a noble creature. It is written, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." But, as a sinner, man is a base and dishonourable being, only worthy to be destroyed. In that character he has no claims to be regarded of God at all. If it had pleased the divine supremacy to blot this rebel race from existence, God might readily have repaired the loss by the creation of superior beings; and it was lowliness of the tenderest kind which led our Lord, who took not up angels when they fell, to take up the seed of Abraham. If it were possible for some tall archangel to espouse the cause of emmets upon their hill in yonder forest, it would be a wondrous stoop; yet it would be nothing compared with the condescension of the eternal God in bowing from his lofty throne to redeem and sanctify the sons of men. We are frail creatures at the best; born yesterday, we die to-day: we are as green leaves in the forest for a while, and then our autumn comes, we fade, and the wind carries us away. For such ephemera the Lord of glory came to this sin-shadowed globe. Were he not of a lowly mind, he had never found his delights with the sons of men, nor would he have thought upon the woes of poor and needy ones.

Herein, in the next place, he showed his lowliness—that *he actually assumed our nature.* I cannot tell that story, it is too wonderful. A free spirit voluntarily encases itself in human clay: a pure spirit willingly becomes a partaker of flesh and blood! This is marvellous lowliness. The strong is compassed with infirmity; the happy assumes capacity for suffering; the infinitely holy becomes one of a race notorious for its iniquity! This is a triumph of lowliness. The great God, the Infinite of ages, unites himself with a human body; he is born into our infancy, he grows up into our youth, he toils through our manhood; he accomplishes a life like our own! This is a miracle of lowliness. Methinks

the angels still gaze into these things, and wonder at the Word made flesh. It is particularly said of our incarnate Lord that he was "seen of angels"; and that leads us to believe that angels watched him with intense curiosity, and ever-growing interest, wondering what it all could mean, that he, who made and ruled the heavens, should be born of a woman, and made under the law. They wondered that he should eat, and drink, and sleep, and sigh, and suffer, like the creatures of his hand; and should, indeed, be such as they were! Surely they talk of it now with hushed voices and astonished hearts, and will so talk of it throughout the ages. Made lower than his angels are, his angels must feel a solemn awe at such a divine descent of love. This lowliness was such as only God could display: let us worship in the person of our Lord a condescending love as unique as the Person who exhibited it.

Furthermore, when our Lord found himself below, in the fashion of a man, he manifested his true lowliness by *carrying out to the full the part of a servant.* He had taken upon himself the form of a servant by becoming man, but it was no matter of form with him. He became actually obedient; having put on the livery of service, he executed the lowest office. Never scullion in a king's kitchen did menial work so thoroughly as he. In his great house there are vessels to honour and to dishonour, and he selected to be used for the lowest offices; he made himself of no reputation; he became a servant of servants; all they that saw him laughed him to scorn; "he was despised, and we esteemed him not." If anybody was wanted to talk with a fallen woman, he was soon seen sitting on the well; if anyone was needed to win a publican, he was speedily at the house of Zaccheus. If any man must needs be slandered as having a devil and being mad, he is ready to bear the worst reproach. He could truthfully say, "Ye call me Master, and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am"; yet he, their Master and Lord, had washed their feet, and therein proved that he was meek, and lowly of heart. Brothers, it is a wonderful thing that the Lord of all should have become the servant of all; it is so wonderful that many have lost their way in thinking of it; they have been unable to grasp the idea of Godhead combined with servitude, majesty united with obedience. Indeed, it is only by faith that we can realize that he that built all things yet became so poor a thing as Mary's Son, so sad a being as the Man of sorrows, so lowly a personage as the "despised and rejected of men." Yet so it was; and herein he showed the truth of his own statement, "I am meek and lowly in heart." He wore the yoke himself, and therefore can experimentally say, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls." This is he who breaks not the bruised reed, and quenches not the smoking flax. This is he who "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." His life was one long proof of meekness and lowliness, and in nothing did he fail: he exhorts us to conquer by the same persevering methods; for he has proved that gentleness and meekness will prevail.

Still, let me keep you thinking upon the lowliness of your Lord when I bid you remember *his life-long poverty.* He does not advise his disciples voluntarily to espouse poverty, unless it be for his sake, and then they do well. Times have been, and may be again, when believers must forsake all things for his cause; but in his day some of his disciples

ministered to him of their substance, and therefore had substance. He did not command these to renounce that substance, and become poor, though I doubt not that, when persecution came, many of them gladly did so for his sake. Not to all did he put the test, "Sell all that thou hast"; but it was needful to his own personal work that he should become poor, that his people might be made rich; and this he cheerfully endured. He was laid in a borrowed cradle in the stable wherein he was born; he dwelt in his work-life in borrowed houses, and lived upon the charity of his followers; and when he rested, it was in a borrowed bed; for though the foxes had holes, he had not where to lay his head. He preached from a borrowed boat; and when he fell asleep, and died, he was buried in a borrowed tomb, for he had no foot of land for a possession. He endured poverty as if he were to the manner born; for he was quite at home among the poor and lowly, receiving sinners and eating with them. Truly, a dignity surrounded him far more real than that which has been conceived to hedge a king; and yet in his poverty he never seemed uneasy, and the society of the poor and unlearned never grieved him. He was with the poorest as one of them; and they knew it, and therefore they loved to gather about him. He was so sweetly and tenderly their associate that the common people heard him gladly.

Remember, that he might have quitted that poverty at any moment; he that could turn water into wine, might have quaffed full many a delicious draught had he so willed; he that could multiply bread and fish needed never to have hungered. A word from him might have created palaces more wonderful than the dreams of Aladdin, and wealth greater than the abundance of Solomon, for nothing was impossible to him. If he had willed to make himself the object of his own life, he could have surrounded himself with every luxury; but, instead thereof, "though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." In this he magnified his lowliness.

But I think I see more of his lowliness at times in *his associates* than in anything else; because men may be very poor, and yet they may be very proud. I think I have seen it sadly so. I have known men without a penny wherewith to bless themselves as full of caste feeling as the wealthiest peer. They are working-men, it may be, but they think themselves superior persons, of remarkable gifts, and eminent respectability. We are a little overdone with superior persons just now. Almost everywhere I come across them, in this department and in that, and, of course, I look up to them with such respect as I can; but sometimes a little more reverence is asked of us than we can conveniently bestow. In this age we have to be careful not to trench upon the dignity of certain persons; and yet he who was in all respects superior to us all, never played the superior person once in all his life. He sat on a well, and talked to a woman; and his disciples, we read, marvelled that he spoke to *a woman*. It is not to "*the* women," as we get it in our Authorized Version, but the Revised Version puts it more correctly, "they marvelled that he was speaking with a woman." They thought that such a one as he should not speak to any woman; for they were tinctured with the exclusiveness of the period. I do not suppose that it occurred to our Lord that he was doing anything remarkable in speaking to a woman; for he was born of

woman, and he never disowned the tender ties which come of such a birth. To some men it would be a great come-down to speak familiarly to any one if he did not keep a carriage. Even in our churches the silly caste feeling will intrude, and brethren in Christ hardly think a poor saint to be their equal. Our Lord had no pride of manner about him, for his lowliness was in his heart. We read that the *publicans and sinners* gathered round him: even women of ill-fame listened with tearful eyes to his teaching. Oh, no, *we* never mention them, of course! We call them "outcasts," and treat them as offcasts: yet Jesus had a kind word for them. What a congregation he often had, of those whom Pharisees abhorred! yet he never said to one of them, "Begone!" His rule was to welcome all, saying, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." Those publicans were certainly very mean characters; they collected a hateful tax for the foreigner, and squeezed out an extra portion for themselves: but yet the Saviour never said to a single publican "Begone!" Quite the contrary, he gave the publican an honourable place in his parable; he made one of them an apostle, and he went to abide in the house of another, who received him joyfully. He did not merely speak a good word to these degraded persons, but he actually sat at table with them as a friend. "Horrible, was it not?" So the Pharisees thought. "Glorious," say we, as we reverence that divine humility which scorned nothing that lived, and especially nothing in the form of man or woman. "This man receiveth sinners," was said in disdain: let it be thundered out in a hymn as glorious as the song of the seraphim, who continually do cry, "Holy, holy, holy!" Never was purity more pure than when its incarnation bowed to become "a Friend of publicans and sinners."

He did what was more singular still: he received *little children*. Now, I can see some reason for talking with grown-up men and women, even if they be debased and depraved; but as for those boys and girls, what can be done with them? When they heard the children crying "Hosanna" in the temple, the Pharisees demanded of him, "Hearest thou what *these* say?" As much as to say, "These boys! are these thine admirers? Dost thou find thy followers among children?" He had a lowly answer for them; but it was one which silenced them. These hosannas came of our blessed Lord having said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." He accepted children as the pattern of the kind of people who enter his kingdom; he himself was called God's holy child Jesus; and he was at home with children because of his perfect guilelessness and gentleness. Proud men seldom care for children, nor children for them; but our Lord, in his true lowliness of heart loved children, and they loved him.

I wish we had a longer time in which to set out all the lovely lowliness of our adorable Christ; but I must only gather a few ears where I would have preferred to have reaped sheaves. Our Lord's *patient bearing under accusations* that were so foul and false, was another proof of his lowliness. "I hear," says a man, "that a calumny has been whispered against me, and I will drag it to light. I will have it out, let it cost what it may. Who dares breathe upon my character? He shall feel the law, and know that he cannot defame me with impunity." Some professing Christians appear to lose their balance when

misrepresented: the lamb roars like a lion, and the ox eats flesh like the leopard. Churches have been rent, and families ruined, to avenge a hasty word. Is not that spirit the opposite of the mind of our blessed Master? They said he was a drunken man and a wine-bibber: the charge must have grieved him, but he did not become angry, and threaten his accusers. It was most important that his character should be cleared; he smiled to himself as he thought, "I will not contradict the accusation, for everybody knows that it is not true." They said that he had a devil, and he did condescend to answer *that*, and confounded all his accusers by making them see the absurdity of the charge; for if the devil was in Jesus fighting against the devil, then the devil must have become divided against himself, and his kingdom would soon come to an end. Towards the end of our Lord's life, his enemies gathered up their charges, and flung them in set form before Pilate's judgment-seat, but he answered them never a word: "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before her shearer, so opened he not his mouth." In silence he maintained his lowliness. Oh, if he had spoken who could speak as never man spake; if he had defended himself with his own irresistible oratory, with such a subject as himself to speak upon, he might have made them all go out of the judgment-hall, as once he had scattered them when his client was a woman taken in adultery. He might have turned the crowd against their rulers, had he chosen; or divided their counsels by setting Pharisees against Sadducees, but he sought not himself. He had been content to ask, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" "For which of those works do ye stone me?" And when he came to his end he had no harder word for them than "Father, forgive them!"

To crown all, you know how our Well-beloved *died*. He laid down his life for us—dearest pledge of lowliness! The decease which he accomplished at Jerusalem was no famous death in battle, amid the roar of cannon, and the blast of trumpet, shaking heaven and earth with tidings of victory. His was no death amid the tears of a nation who prepare for their beloved prince a more than royal mourning. No, he dies with malefactors; he dies at the common gallows; he dies amid a crowd of scoffers, where felons cast contempt upon him as he hangs between them. Hear how the ribald throng challenge his divine sonship, and say, "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross"! The bearing of such obloquy, the endurance of such scorn, was the utmost proof of a lowliness of spirit which we humbly admire, and feebly imitate, but which we can never equal.

II. I shall but occupy you one or two minutes while I try to explain THE CAUSE OF THIS LOWLINESS.

His supreme lowliness of character grew out of *the actual lowliness of his heart*. He never aimed at humility, nor laboured after it: it was natural to him. Of all sickening things, the pride that apes humility is the most loathsome: not a particle of that nauseous vice was found in our Lord. He never puts on an air, nor strikes an attitude, nor plays the humble part; but he *is* meek and lowly, and all can see it. He is never other than he seems to be, and he always is and seems to be the meekest of mankind. His inmost heart was seen, and seen to be all lowliness.

Why was he so? I conceive that he was so lowly because *he was so great.* A little man feels the necessity of magnifying himself, and therefore becomes proud. Pride is essentially meanness. It is the little man that cannot afford to be-little himself. Some of us are too low to be lowly, too mean to be meek. True greatness is ever unconscious, and never seeks to make a display. It magnifies a man when he can sink himself for the good of others. No one knew how to descend so gracefully as our Lord, for his great mind knew well the ways of self-denial. A man who is greatly rich is not ashamed to be seen in well-worn clothes in those same places where the pretentious bankrupt would not venture except in his newest attire. He who has a small estate puts a diamond ring upon his finger, and holds it so that it sparkles in the light, to let all people see that he is a man worth something; but your eminent men of wealth scorn such display. Truly great men are humble. I have often heard it said of men of large substance, "He is singularly unassuming; you would never dream that he is a man of property." So, too, of men of genius have we heard it said, "he gave himself no airs, he was as modest and friendly as the least of us." Just so; and that very much accounts for his high standing. He that is somebody to others is nobody to himself. He who was more than all, even our Lord Jesus Christ, was, therefore, for that very reason, lowly of heart.

He was lowly, next, because *he was so loving.* Mothers are frequently proud *of* their children, but, I think, they are seldom, if ever, proud *to* their children. No, if they love them, they do not think that it is any condescension to kiss them, or wash them, or carry them in their bosom. I never heard of a father who thought that he was very humble-minded because he allowed his boy to clamber upon his knee, and hold on with his arms about his neck. Those whom we love we elevate to an equality with ourselves; or, rather, we go down to them. Love is a charming leveller. Jesus had so much love that he could not be anything but lowly towards his little ones. You never yet heard even a blasphemer impute pride to God. Though our blood has chilled when we have heard the High and Mighty One arraigned for this and that by arrogant tongues; yet we have not known profanity to run in that line. It would be too absurd to impute pride either to God, or to his ever-blessed Son, Jesus Christ. The reason for this evident freedom from pride is the fact that "God is love." The fulness of divine love blinds the eye which looks askance upon it. God is patient, for he is loving: Christ is lowly of heart, because his heart is made of love.

Moreover, once more, our blessed Master was *so absorbed in his great object* that he was necessarily lowly. The man who is driving at a great object has no time for the affectations of self-adulation. He has no time in which to think of how he appears to others. He does not stand at the glass to arrange his beauties; the idea would be too absurd. He cannot be too particular about how he puts that poetic word, or how he mouths that polished sentence; his sole desire is to deliver his message, and to impress men with the matter in hand. Earnestness carries the speaker beyond the orator's rules of self-display; his rhetoric is melted down by his enthusiasm. A great orator can readily be made to appear ridiculous by the comic critic, who coolly looks down from the

gallery upon him; but what cares he? His theme so absorbs him that he has forgotten all elegance of attitude and gesture, and only cares to carry his point. He would make himself a fool, ten thousand times deep, if he could but win his suit, and bless his country thereby. He cares for nothing but his subject and his aim. So is it pre-eminently with our Lord: he pursues his course careless of man's esteem. He burns his way, his zeal eats him up, he is straitened till his work is accomplished, and therefore he has no thought about the maintaining of his dignity. His greatness and his intense devotion forbid anything approximating to pride, and by force of nature he is meek and lowly in heart. Because he has a great object to achieve, and that object has absorbed his whole self, he must walk in all lowliness of mind. Blessed Master, teach us this way of lowliness! Fire us with an ambition for thy glory which shall shut out every thought of pride!

III. What are the LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THIS LOWLINESS of our Lord?

The lessons are, first, brethren, *let us be lowly*. Did I hear one say, "Well, I will try to be lowly"? You cannot do it in that way. We must not try to act the lowly part; we must *be* lowly, and then we shall naturally act in a humble manner. It is astonishing how much of pride there is in the most modest. Of course I do not mean in those who say that they are perfect. No, I leave them to their own vain-glory; but in us poor, imperfect creatures, what a deal of pride there is! How we condemn pride! We feel that it would be well if all were as humble as we are. We boast that we detest boasting. We flatter ourselves that we hate flattery. When we are told that we are singularly free from pride, we feel as proud as Lucifer himself at the consciousness that the compliment is right well deserved. We are so experienced, so solid, so discerning, so free from self-confidence, that we are the first to be caught in the net of self-satisfaction. Brethren, we must pray God to make us humble. If we become lowliest of the lowly it will not be much of a condescension on our part; we shall only come down to the point which we ought never to have left. Down in the dust is the fit place for such poor mortals as we are. What right have we to be anything else but meek and lowly?

Alas! we can be very proud in many ways: let me give you a case or two in point. Yonder is one that is called to suffer, and he rebels against it. Hear his complaint—"Why should I be called to endure such great trials? What have I done that I am thus tried?" Do you not at once detect the great "I"? Very different is this from the lowly prayer, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

"But, then, persons have spoken evil of me. I do not deserve to be treated thus." Clearly it is specially wrong for any one to speak amiss of such an excellent being as you are. There lies the grievance. Because you are so good, it is horrible wickedness to traduce you. You reply, "But, really, it was so malicious, and the charge was so absurd and unreasonable." Just so. People ought to be peculiarly careful not to hurt your feelings, for you are so deserving and praiseworthy. Is not self-esteem the spring of half our sorrow? We are so wonderfully good in our own judgment that we claim the box-seat of the coach, and the chief seat in the synagogue. If we were really lowly of heart, we

should say, "I have been treated very badly, but when I think of how my Lord was treated, I cannot dream of complaining. This severe critic cannot see my excellences; but I do not wonder, for I cannot see them myself. He has been finding fault with me, and his charges were not true; but, if he had known me better, he might have found more fault with me, and have been nearer the truth. If I do not deserve censure in this way, I do in another; and so I will cheerfully bear what is measured out to me. Yea, if it be in no sense my due, I will give my back to the smiters, as my Master did." Oh, that the Lord would make us meek and lowly in heart, and we should submit to wrong rather than resist evil!

"But surely," cries one, "you do not want me to associate with sinners!" No, dear friend, I do not want such a good person as you are to go near them at all; I could not so degrade your honourable self. Moreover, if you did go near them, you would aggravate them by your self-opinionated goodness. If your perfections are not quite so full-blown as usual, I would, however, suggest that you might do sinners good by kindly speaking to them; and that to gather up your skirts in fear and trembling, lest you should be defiled by their presence is not the most excellent way. When you are afraid lest the wind should blow from a sinful person towards your nobility, you act the fool, if not the hypocrite; perhaps both. Why, you would have been in hell yourself if it had not been for sovereign grace! You, fine ladies and prime gentlefolk, you would have been as surely cast away as the vilest of mankind, if it had not been for infinite compassion! It ill becomes us to boast, since we have enough sins of our own to plunge us in despair, were it not for the love of the lowly Saviour, who his own self bore our sins in his own body on the tree. O Lord, stamp out our pride, and make us lowly in heart!

Lastly, *let us learn to say to the despondent and timorous words of cheer.* Since the Lord Jesus Christ is so meek and lowly, poor, trembling, guilty one, you may come to him! You may come to him now! I was sitting the other night amongst some excellent friends, who, I suppose, were none of them rich, and some of them poor. I am sure it never entered into my head to think how much money they owned, for I felt myself very much at home with them, until one of them remarked, "You do not mind mixing with us poor folk?" Then I felt quite ashamed for myself that they should think it necessary to make such a remark. I was so much one with them that I felt honoured by having fellowship with them in the things of God, and it troubled me that they should think I was doing anything remarkable in conversing with them. Dear friends, do not think hardly of any of us who are ministers of Christ; and you will think hardly of us if you conceive that we think it a coming-down to associate with any of you! We are in heart and soul your brothers, bone of your bone, your truest friends whether you are rich or poor. We desire your good, for we are your servants for Christ's sake. Above all, do not think hardly of our Lord and Master by supposing that it will be a strange thing for him to come to your house, or to your heart. It is his habit to forgive the guilty, and renew the sinful. Come to him at once, and he will accept you now. Jesus is exceedingly approachable. He is not hedged about

with guards to keep off the poor or the sinful. Your room may be very humble; what cares he for that? He will come, and hear your prayer. Many a time Jesus has had no room to pray in, but

"Cold mountains, and the midnight air,
Witnessed the fervour of his prayer."

Do you complain that you cannot arrange your words correctly? What is that to him? He looks more at the sincerity of your heart than at the grammar of your language. Let your heart talk to him without words, and he will understand you.

Do you complain with shamed face that you are such a sinner? You are not the first sinner that Jesus has met with, nor will you be the last. You are heavy-laden with sin; but he knows more about the weight of sin than you do. That terrible load of guilt wearies you; but it pressed him down even more terribly when it brought him into the dust of death. It makes you weep to think of sin; but it caused him to sweat great drops of blood. You feel that you cannot live under so crushing a burden; and he did not live under it, but gave up the ghost in agony. Do not crucify your Lord afresh by suspecting that he is proud, and will therefore pass you by. Do not insult him by dreaming that he will reject you for your insignificance or unworthiness. Come, and welcome, to him who will delight to bless you. Come to him at once, without further question or hesitation. Come just as you are, fall at his pierced feet, and trust the merit of his blood, and the good Lord will accept you on the spot, for he has said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

God bless you, by leading you all to love this lowly and loving Lord! Even at this present moment I pray that you may take that step which will secure our meeting in heaven to adore eternally our King, so meek and lowly, who will then dwell in the midst of us, and lead us to living fountains of water!

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Matthew xi.

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"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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THE TRUE TABERNACLE, AND ITS GLORY OF GRACE AND PEACE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, SEPTEMBER 27TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."—John i. 14.

"For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."—John i. 17.

THERE was a time when God freely communed with men. The voice of the Lord God was heard walking in the garden in the cool of the day. With unfallen Adam the great God dwelt in sweet and intimate fellowship; but sin came and not only destroyed the garden, but destroyed the intercourse of God with his creature, man. A great gulf opened between man as evil, and God as infinitely pure; and had it not been for the amazing goodness of the most High, we must all of us for ever have been banished from his presence, and from the glory of his power. The Lord God in infinite love resolved that he himself would bridge the distance, and would again dwell with man; and in token of this he made himself manifest to his chosen nation Israel when they were in the wilderness. He was pleased to dwell in type and symbol among his people, in the very centre and heart of their camp. Do you see yonder tent with its curtains of goats' hair in the centre of the canvas city? You cannot see within it; but it was all glorious within with precious wood, and pure gold, and tapestry of many colours. Within its most sacred shrine shone forth a bright light between the wings of cherubim, which light was the symbol of the presence of the Lord. But if you cannot see within, yet you can see above the sacred tent a cloud, which arises from the top of the Holy of Holies, and then expands like a vast tree so as to cover all the host, and protect the chosen of God from the intense heat of the sun, so apt to make the traveller faint when passing over the burning sand. If you will wait till the sun is down, that same cloud will become luminous, and light up the whole camp. Thus it was both shade and light; and by its means was enjoyed that safety which was afterwards set forth in the promise, "The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night." Over all the glory was a defence and a comfort. The Lord dealt not so with any nation, save

only his people Israel, of whom he said, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

The day of the type is over; we see no more a nation secluded from all others and made to be as "the church in the wilderness." God doth not now confine his abode to one people; for "The God of the whole earth shall he be called." There is now no spot on earth where God dwells in preference to another. Did not our Lord say, at the well of Sychar, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." "But . . . the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth"? Wherever true hearts seek the Lord, he is found of them. He is as much present on the lone mountain's side as in the aisles of yonder abbey, or in the galleries of this tabernacle. "Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?"

Yet there is a true house of God, a real temple of the Infinite, a living abode of the Godhead. The epistle to the Hebrews speaks of "the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man." There is still a trysting-place where God doth still meet with man, and hold fellowship with him. That place is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." The manhood of Christ is become to us the anti-type of that tent in the centre of the camp. God is in Christ Jesus; Christ Jesus is God; and in his blessed person God dwells in the midst of us as in a tent; for such is the force of the original in our text. "The Word was made flesh, and tabernacled, or tented, among us." That is to say, in Christ Jesus the Lord dwelt among men, as God of old dwelt in his sanctuary in the midst of the tribes of Israel. This is very delightful and hopeful for us: the Lord God doth dwell among us through the incarnation of his Son.

But the substance far excels the shadow; for in the wilderness the Lord only dwelt in the abode of man, but now his approach to us is closer, for he dwells in the flesh of man. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Note that word "flesh." It doth not say, "The Word was made *man*": it means that, but the use of the word "flesh" brings the Lord Jesus still closer to us, and shows that he took on him the very nature and substance of manhood: he did not merely assume the name and notion, and appearance, of manhood, but the reality: the weakness, the suffering, the mortality of our manhood he actually took into union with himself. He was no phantom, or apparition, but he had a human body and a human soul. "The Word was made flesh." When the Lord became bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, his incarnation in a human body brought him far nearer to man than when he only abode within curtains, and occupied a tent in the midst of Israel.

Moreover, it is to be noted that God does in the person of Jesus not merely dwell among men; but he hath joined himself unto men—the Word not only dwelt in flesh, but "was made flesh." It is impossible to use words which are exactly accurate to describe the wonderful incarnation of the Son of God in human flesh; but these words are used to show that our Lord is as truly and as really man as he is God. Not

only does God dwell in the body of man; but our Lord Jesus is God and man in one person. He is not ashamed to speak of men as his brethren. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." So that the Lord Jesus is one with us. This approach to us is exceeding close. God was never one with the tabernacle, but in Christ Jesus he is one with us. This union hath in it a sweetness of sympathy, a tenderness of relationship, and a condescension of fellowship greatly to be admired. Now we listen to the music of that blessed name Emanuel, "God with us." In the person of the only begotten, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, we see God reconciling the world unto himself. Let us rejoice and be glad that we have in Jesus more than Israel had in the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. The ancient believer gazed upon the sacred tent, he thought of the holy place of sacrifice, and the Holy of Holies, the inner shrine of the Lord's indwelling; but we have infinitely more, we have God in our nature, and in him "truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."

In and around the tent wherein the Lord dwelt in the centre of the camp there was a manifestation of the presence of God. This was the glory of that house: but how scanty was the revelation! A bright light which I have already mentioned, the Shekinah, is said to have shone over the mercy-seat; but the high priest only could see it, and he only saw it once in the year when he entered with blood within the vail. Outside, above the holy place, there was the manifest glory of the pillar of cloud by day, and of fire by night. This sufficed to bear witness that God was there; but still, cloud and fire are but physical appearances, and cannot convey a true appearance of God, who is a spirit. God cannot be perceived by the senses; and yet the fiery, cloudy pillar could appeal to the eyes only. The excellence of the indwelling of God in Christ is this—that there is in him a glory as of the only begotten of the Father, the moral and spiritual glory of Godhead. This is to be seen, but not with the eyes; this is to be perceived, but not by the carnal senses: this is seen, and heard, and known, by spiritual men, whose mental perceptions are keener than those of sight and hearing. In the person of the Lord there is a glory which is seen by our faith, which is discerned of our renewed spirits, and is made to operate upon our hearts. The glory of God in the sanctuary was seen only by the priest of the house of Aaron; the glory of God in the face of Christ is seen by all believers, who are all priests unto God. That glory the priest beheld but once in the year; but we steadily behold that glory at all times, and are transformed by the sight. The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is not a thing of outward appearance, to be beheld with the eyes, like the pillar of cloud and fire; but there is an abiding, steady lustre of holy, gracious, truthful character about our Lord Jesus Christ, which is best seen by those who by reason of sanctification are made fit to discern it. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God; yea, they do see him in Christ Jesus. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." Many of us besides the apostles can say, "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." We have not seen Jesus raise the dead; we have

not seen him cast out devils; we have not seen him hush the winds and calm the waves; but we do see, with our mind's eye, his spotless holiness, his boundless love, his superlative truth, his wondrous heavenliness; in a word, we have seen, and do see, his fulness of grace and truth; and we rejoice in the fact that the tabernacling of God among men in Christ Jesus is attended with a more real glory than the mere brilliance of light and the glow of flame. The condescension of Christ's love is to us more glorious than the pillar of cloud, and the zeal of our Lord's self-sacrifice is more excellent than the pillar of fire. As we think of the divine mysteries which meet in the person of our Lord, we do not envy Israel the gracious manifestations vouchsafed her when "a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord covered the tabernacle"; for we have all this and more in our incarnate God, who is with us always, even to the end of the world.

As the Holy Spirit shall help me, I shall at this time say, first of all, *Let us behold this tabernacling of God;* and, secondly, *Let us avail ourselves of this tabernacling of God in all the ways for which it was intended.*

I. First, then, LET US BEHOLD THIS TABERNACLING OF GOD WITH US. "We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." In Jesus Christ all the attributes of God are to be seen; veiled, but yet verily there. You have only to read the gospels, and to look with willing eyes, and you shall behold in Christ all that can possibly be seen of God. It is veiled in human flesh, as it must be; for the glory of God is not to be seen by us absolutely; it is toned down to these dim eyes of ours; but the Godhead is there, the perfect Godhead in union with the perfect manhood of Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Two divine things are more clearly seen in Jesus than aught else. Upon these I would speak at this time, considering the two together, and then each one separately—"Full of grace and truth."

Observe the two glorious qualities, joined inseparably—grace and truth—and observe that they are spoken of *in the concrete.* The apostle says that the only begotten is "full of grace and truth." He did not come to tell us about grace, but actually to bring us grace. He is not full of the news of grace and truth, but of grace and truth themselves. Others had been messengers of gracious tidings, but he came to bring grace. Others teach us truth, but Jesus is the truth. He is that grace and truth whereof others spake. Jesus is not merely a teacher, an exhorter, a worker of grace and truth; but these heavenly things are in him: he is full of them. I want you to note this. It raises such a difference between Christ and others: you go to others to hear of grace and truth, but you must go to Christ to see them. There may be, there is, grace in other men; but not as it is in Christ: they have it as water flowing through a pipe, but he has it as water in its fountain and source. He has grace to communicate to the sons of men, grace without measure, grace essential and abiding. There is truth in others where God has wrought it, by his Spirit; but it is not in them as it is in Christ. In him dwell the depth, the substance, the essence of the fact. Grace and truth come to us by him, and yet they evermore abide in him. I say again, our Lord did not merely come to teach grace and

truth, or to impress them upon us; but he came to exhibit in his own person, life, and work, all the grace and truth which we need. He has brought us grace in rivers and truth in streams: of these he has an infinite fulness; of that fulness all his saints receive.

This grace and truth are *blended*. The "and" between the two words I would treat as more than a common conjunction. The two rivers unite in one fulness—"Full of grace and truth": that is to say, the grace is truthful grace, grace not in fiction nor in fancy, grace not to be hoped for and to be dreamed of, but grace every atom of which is fact; redemption which does redeem, pardon which does blot out sin, renewal which actually regenerates, salvation which completely saves. We have not here blessings which charm the ear and cheat the soul; but real, substantial favours from God that cannot lie. Then blend these things the other way. "Grace and truth": the Lord has come to bring us truth, but it is not the kind of truth which censures, condemns, and punishes; it is gracious truth, truth steeped in love, truth saturated with mercy. The truth which Jesus brings to his people comes not from the judgment-seat, but from the mercy-seat; it hath a gracious drift and aim about it, and ever tends unto salvation. His light is the life of men. If thou art overshadowed with a dark truth which seems to deepen thy despair, look thou to it again and thou wilt perceive within it a hidden light which is sown for the righteous. The darkness of convincing and humbling truth maketh for light: by engendering despair of self, heart-searching truth is meant to drive thee to the true hope. There is grace to God's people in everything that falls from the lips of Jesus Christ. His lips are like lilies dropping sweet smelling myrrh; myrrh in itself is bitter, but such is the grace of our Lord Jesus that his lips impart sweetness to it. See how grace and truth thus blend, and qualify each other! The grace is all true, and the truth is all gracious. This is a wondrous compound made according to the art of the divine Apothecary. Where else is grace so true, or truth so gracious?

Furthermore, it is grace and truth *balanced*. I wish I were able to communicate my thoughts this morning as they came to me when I was meditating upon this passage; but this thought almost speaks for itself. The Lord Jesus Christ is full of grace; but then he has not neglected the other quality which is somewhat sterner, namely, that of truth. I have known many in this world very loving and affectionate, but they have not been faithful: on the other hand, I have known men to be sternly honest and truthful, but they have not been gentle and kind: but in the Lord Jesus Christ there is no defect either way. He is full of grace which doth invite the publican and the sinner to himself; but he is full of truth which doth repel the hypocrite and Pharisee. He does not hide from man a truth however terrible it may be, but he plainly declares the wrath of God against all unrighteousness. But when he has spoken terrible truth, he has uttered it in such a gracious and tender manner, with so many tears of compassion for the ignorant and those that are out of the way, that you are as much won by his grace as convinced by his truth. Our Lord's ministry is not truth alone, nor grace alone; but it is a balanced, well-ordered system of grace and truth. The Lord himself is in his character "just and having salvation." He is both King of righteousness and King of peace. He does not even save unjustly,

nor does he proclaim truth unlovingly. Grace and truth are equally conspicuous in him.

Beloved, notice here that both these qualities in our Lord are *at the full*. He is "full of grace." Who could be more so? In the person of Jesus Christ the immeasurable grace of God is treasured up. God has done for us by Christ Jesus exceeding abundantly above all that we ask, or even think. It is not possible even for imagination to conceive of any person more gracious than God in Christ Jesus. You cannot desire, certainly you cannot require, anything that should exceed what is found of grace in the person, offices, work, and death of the only begotten. Come, ye that have large minds, and intellects that are creative, and see if ye can devise anything that should be mentioned in the same day with what God, in the infinite glory of his grace, has given us in the person of his Son. And there is an equal fulness of truth about our Lord. He himself, as he comes to us as the revelation and manifestation of God, declares to us, not some truth, but all truth. All of God is in Christ; and all of God means all that is true, and all that is right, and all that is faithful, and all that is just, all that is according to righteousness and holiness. Christ Jesus has brought to us the justice, truth, and righteousness of God to the full: he is the Lord our righteousness. There are no reserves of disagreeable fact in Christ. There is nothing hidden from us of truth that might alarm us, nor anything that might have shaken our confidence; nor, on the other hand, is any truth kept back which might have increased our steadfastness. He says, "If it were not so I would have told you." Admire the full-orbed splendour of the Sun of Righteousness. Ask not with Pilate, "What is truth?" but behold it in God's dear Son. Oh, I know not how to speak to you upon themes so full and deep! How shall I, that am but as a twinkling dewdrop on a blade of grass, reflect the full glory of this Sun of Righteousness? But all truth and all grace dwell in Christ in all their fulness beyond conception, and the two lie in each other's bosoms for ever, to bless us with boundless, endless joy and glory.

Thus have I taken the two together. Now I want to dwell briefly on each one by itself.

Grace is put first. "We beheld his glory the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace." Jesus Christ is the Son of God; he is his only begotten Son. Others are begotten of God, but no other was ever begotten of God as Christ was; consequently, when he came into this world the glory that was about him was a glory as of the only begotten. A very singular, and very special, and incommunicable glory abides in the person of our Lord. Part of this was the glory of his grace. Now, in the Old Testament, in that thirty-fourth chapter of Exodus, which we read in part this morning, you notice that the glory of God lay in his being "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." The glory of the only begotten of the Father must lie in the same things as the glory of the Father, namely, in longsuffering, goodness, and truth. In Christ there is a wonderful display of the gentleness, patience, pity, mercy, and love of God. Not merely did he teach the grace of God, and invite us to the grace of God, but in himself he displayed the grace of God.

This is to be seen, first, in his incarnation. It is a wonderful instance

of divine grace that the Word should be made flesh and dwell among us, and reveal his glory to us. Apart from anything that springs out of the incarnation of Christ, that incarnation itself is a wondrous act of grace. There must be hope for men now that man is next akin to God through Jesus Christ. The angels were not mistaken when they not only sang, "Glory to God in the highest," but also, "on earth peace, goodwill towards men," because in Bethlehem the Son of God was born of a virgin. God in our nature must mean God with gracious thoughts towards us. If the Lord had meant to destroy the race, he never would have espoused it and taken it into union with himself. There is fulness of grace in the fact of the Word made flesh tabernacling among us.

More than this, there is fulness of grace in the life of Christ when we consider that he lived here in order to perfect himself as our High Priest. Was he not made perfect through his sufferings, that he might sympathize with us in all our woes? He was compassed with infirmities, and bare our sorrows, and endured those crosses of the human life which press so heavily on our own shoulders; and all this to make himself able to deal graciously with us in a tender and brotherly way. Apart from that which comes out of this wonderful brotherhood, there is a bottomless depth of grace about the fellowship itself. The Lord Jesus cannot curse me, for he has borne my curse: he cannot be unkind to me, for he has shared my sorrows. If every pang that rends my heart has also rent his heart, and if into all my woes he has descended even deeper than I have gone, it must mean love to me, it cannot mean anything else; and it must mean truth, for Jesus did not play at fellowship, his griefs were real. I say then that this manifestation of God in the person of Christ Jesus is seen in his sorrowing life to be full of grace and truth.

Then think for a minute of what he did. He was so full of grace that when he spake his words dropped a fatness of grace, the dew of his own love was upon all his discourses; and when he moved about and touched men here and there, virtue went out of him, because he was so full of it. At one time he spake and pardoned a sinner, saying, "Thy sins be forgiven thee": at another moment he battled with the consequences of sin, raising men from sickness and from death: again he turned himself and fought with the prince of darkness himself, and cast him out from those whom he tormented. He went about like a cloud which is big with rain, and therefore plentifully waters waste places. His life was boundless compassion. There was a power of grace about his garments, his voice, his look; and in all he was so true that none ever thought him capable of subterfuge. Everywhere he went he scattered grace among the children of men; and he is just the same now; fulness of grace abides in him still.

When it came to his death, which was the pouring out of his soul, then his fulness of grace was seen. He was full of grace indeed, forasmuch as he emptied himself to save men. He was himself not only man's Saviour, but his salvation. He gave himself for us. He was indeed full of grace when he bare our sins in his own body on the tree. His was love at its height, since he died on the cross, "the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." Pronounce the word "substitution," and

you cannot help feeling that the Substitute for guilty man was full of grace; or use that other word, "representative," and remember that whatever Jesus did, he did as the covenant head of his people. If he died, they died in him; if he rose again, they rose in him; if he ascended up on high, they ascended in him; and if he sits at the right hand of God, they also sit in the heavenly places in him. When he shall come a second time it shall be to claim the kingdom for his chosen as well as for himself; and all the glory of the future ages is for them, and not for himself alone. He saith, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Oh, the richness of the grace and truth that dwell in our Lord as the representative of his people! he will enjoy nothing unless his people enjoy it with him. "Where I am, there also shall my servant be." To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

There is yet another word higher than "substitution," higher than "representation," and that is "union." We are one with Christ, joined to him by a union that never can be broken. Not only does he do what he does, representing us, but we are joined unto him in one spirit, members of his body, and partakers of his glory. Is not this grace, grace unspeakable? Is it not a miracle of love that worms of earth should ever be one with incarnate Deity, and so one that they never can be separated throughout the ages?

Thus I have shown you that there is in our Lord a fulness of grace. Your own thoughts will dig deeper than mine.

But then it is said there is in him also a fulness of *truth*, by which I understand that in Christ himself, not merely in what he said, and did, and promised, there is a fulness of truth. And this is true, first, in the fact that he is the fulfilment of all the promises that went before concerning him. God had promised great things by his prophets concerning the coming Messiah, but all those predictions are absolutely matters of fact in the person of the Well-beloved. "All the promises of God are yea and Amen in Christ Jesus." Verily he hath bruised the serpent's head. Verily he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Verily he hath proclaimed liberty to the captives. Verily he hath proved himself a prophet like unto Moses.

According to my second text, in verse seventeen, I understand our Lord Jesus to be "truth" in the sense of being the substance of all the types. The law that was given by Moses was but symbolical and emblematical; but Jesus is the truth. He is really that blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel; he is in very deed the paschal lamb of God's passover: he is the burnt-offering, the sin-offering, and the peace-offering—all in one! He is the true scapegoat, the true morning and evening lamb; in fact, he is in truth what all the types and figures were in pattern. Blessed be God, brethren, whenever you see great things in the Old Testament in the type, you see the real truth of those things in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Jew had nothing that we have not: he had nothing even in outline and shadow which we have not obtained in substance. The covenant in its fulness is in Christ: the prophecy is in Moses, the fulfilment is in Jesus: the foreshadowing is in the law, the truth is in the Word made flesh.

Further than that, our Lord Jesus Christ is said to be grace and truth in this sense, that he truthfully deals with matters of fact in the case of our salvation. I know the notion of the world is that the salvation of Christ is a pretty dream, a handsome piece of sentiment. But there is nothing dreamy about it: it is no fiction; it is fact upon fact. The Lord Jesus Christ does not gloss over or conceal the condition of man in his salvation; he finds man condemned, and takes him as condemned in the very worst sense, condemned of a capital offence; and as man's substitute he endures the capital penalty, and dies in the sinner's stead. The Lord Jesus views the sinner as depraved, yea, as dead in trespasses and sins, and he quickens him by his resurrection life. He does not wink at the result of the fall and of actual sin; but he comes to the dead sinner and quickens him; he comes to the diseased heart and heals it. To me the gospel is a wonderful embodiment of omnipotent wisdom and truth. If the gospel had said to men, "The law of God is certainly righteous, but it is too stern, too exacting, and therefore God will wink at many sins, and make provision for salvation by omitting to punish much of human guilt, why, my brethren, we should always have been in jeopardy. If God could be unjust to save us, he could also be changeable, and cast us away. If there was anything rotten in the state of our salvation, we should fear that it would fail us at last. But our foundation is sure, for the Lord has excavated down to the rock; he has taken away every bit of mere sentiment and sham, and his salvation is real throughout. It is a glorious salvation of grace and truth, in which God takes the sinner as he is, and deals with him as he is; yea, and deals with the sinner as God is, on the principles of true righteousness; and yet saves him.

But it means more than that. The Lord deals with us in the way of grace, and that grace encourages a great many hopes, but those hopes are all realized, for he deals with us in truth. Our necessities demand great things, and grace actually supplies those great things. The old law could never make the comers thereunto perfect as pertaining to the conscience, but the grace of God makes believers perfect as pertaining to the conscience. If I were to sit down and try to imagine a flaw in the ground of my salvation by Christ, I could not do it. Believing as I do in him who bore my sins in his own body on the tree, I feel that by no possibility can his atonement fail me. I have not imagination strong enough to feign a reason for distrust: I do not see hole or corner in which any charge could lurk against the man that believes in Jesus Christ. My conscience is satisfied, and more than satisfied. Sometimes it even seems to me that my sins could not have deserved that the Son of God should die. The atonement is greater than the sin. Speak of the vindication of the law!—is not the vindication even greater than the dishonour? Does not the law of God shine out more lustrous in its indescribable glory through the sacrifice of Christ as the penalty for sin, than it would have done had it never been broken, or had all the race of law-breakers been swept into endless destruction? O brothers, in the salvation of Jesus there is a truth of grace unrivalled! There is a deep verity, a substantiality, an inward soul-satisfaction in the sacrifice of Christ, which makes us feel that it is a full atonement—a fountain of "grace and truth."

Nor have I yet quite brought out all the meaning, even if I have succeeded so far. Christ has brought to us "grace and truth"; that is to say, he works in believers both grace and truth. We want grace to rescue us from sin; he has brought it: we need truth in the inward parts; he has wrought it. The system of salvation by atonement is calculated to produce truthful men. The habit of looking for salvation through the great sacrifice fosters the spirit of justice, begets in us a deep abhorrence of evil, and a love for that which is right and true. By nature we are all liars, and either love or make a lie: for this cause we are content with refuges of lies, and we compass ourselves with deceit. In our carnal state we are as full of guile as an egg is full of meat; but when the Lord comes to us in Christ, no longer imputing our trespasses to us, then he takes out of our heart that deceit and desperate wickedness which had else remained there. I say it, and dare avow it, that the system of salvation by the indwelling of God in Christ and the atonement offered by him for men, has a tendency in it to infuse grace into the soul and to produce truth in the life. The Holy Ghost employs it to that end. I pray that you and I may prove it so by the grace which causes us to love both God and man, and the truthfulness with which we deal in all the affairs of life.

Thus has our Lord displayed the glory of God in the grace and truth with which he is filled. I am sorry I have spoken so feebly on a theme so grand. May the Spirit bless you even through the infirmities of my speech!

II. Now I want a few minutes to say to you, Come brothers and sisters, LET US AVAIL OURSELVES OF THIS TABERNACLING OF GOD AMONG US.

First, then, if God has come to dwell among men by the Word made flesh *let us pitch our tents around this central tabernacle;* do not let us live as if God were a long way off. To the Israelites God was equally near from every quarter of the camp. The tabernacle was in the centre, and the centre is equally near to every point of the circumference. No true Israelite could say, "I must go across the sea, or soar up into the air, or dive into the depths to find my God." Every Israelite could say "He dwelleth between the cherubim: I have but to go to his tabernacle to be in his presence and speak with him." Our God is not far from any one of his people this day. We are made nigh by the blood of Christ. God is everywhere present, but there is a higher presence of effectual grace in the person of the only begotten. Do not let us live as if we worshipped a far-off God. Let us not repine as if we were deserted. Let us not feel alone, for the Father is with us.

"God is near thee; therefore cheer thee, sad soul."

Open thy window towards Jerusalem, as Daniel did; pray with thine eye upon Christ, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily in the greatest nearness to us. God is never far away since Christ has come to dwell among men.

Next, *let us resort to this central tabernacle to obtain grace to help in time of need.* Let us come to Christ without fear, for he hath grace to give, and he will give it to us abundantly, whenever we need it. I like to think of the wording of my text. Leave out the

parenthesis, and it runs, "He dwelt among us full of grace." He could not have dwelt among such provoking ones if he had not been full of grace. But if he dwells among us full of grace, we need not fear that he will cast us away because of our sins and failings. I invite you, therefore, to come boldly to him who is full of forgiving love. I beg you to come and receive of his fulness, for grace is truly grace when it is communicated: grace which is not distributed is grace in name only. "Alas!" you say, "I want so much grace." Brother, it is treasured up in Christ for you without measure. It is placed in him that you may have it. Do we not try to persuade the sinner that there is life in a look? Shall I need to persuade saints that grace is equally free to them? Do we not tell the sinner that God is not to be sought for as far away, but that he is waiting to be gracious? Must I tell the believer the same? You may at this moment obtain all the grace you need. The door is open; enter and take what you will. Do not stop till you reach home and go through a set of religious exercises; but here, and now, believe in Jesus to the full. In the centre of the camp is the incarnate God; Israel had but to go to the central tent to find present help in time of trouble. In the person of Christ, who hath said, "I am with you alway, even to the end of the world," there is, in truth, all the grace you can possibly need. Come to this well and drink. Receive of his fulness, and go on your way rejoicing.

What next shall we do? Brethren, since God in Christ is in the midst of us, *let us abide in joyful, peaceful confidence in him who is grace and truth to us.* Do not let us wander to other sources. To whom should we go? Shall we leave our God? Shall we leave his grace, his truth? Do not let us dream that he is changed, for he is God. Do not imagine that he has removed, for he hath said, "This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell, for I have desired it." Do not let us conceive that his grace and truth are exhausted; for his fulness is eternal. Let us receive strong consolation, and remain steadfast, unmovable. Let us quietly rest in the firm belief that all we can want between here and heaven, all that we need this moment and in all moments yet to come, is treasured up in Christ Jesus, who is abidingly the centre of his church and the manifestation of God.

Once more: if this be so, and God does really in Christ dwell in the midst of his people "full of grace and truth," *let us tell everybody of it.* I am sure if I had been an Israelite in the wilderness, and had met an Amalekite or an Edomite, I should have gloried in my God, and in the privileges which his presence secured me. We know that Amalekites and Edomites could not have come into the house of the Lord; but nowadays, if we meet with one who is a stranger, we can tell him of our privilege, with sweet persuasion that the stranger can be brought nigh through the blood of the Lamb. Therefore let us abundantly speak of the dwelling of God with men. Let us tell to all that the Lord has come to man, not in wrath, not in judgment, but "full of grace and truth." O my unconverted hearer, come to Jesus! He is able to save to the uttermost those that come unto God by him. Draw nigh to the meek and lowly Jesus, and you draw nigh to God. He saith, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Publish the invitation of grace to the four winds. Ring out your silver trumpets, or if you have them

not, sound your rams' horns ; but somehow let all people know that the tabernacle of God is with men, and he doth dwell among them. Tell out this news in the far country, that the wandering prodigal son may hear it, and cry, "I will arise, and go to my Father." God has come to men; will not men come to God? In Christ Jesus God invites men to come to him ; will you not come to receive grace and truth?

One more lesson remains, and that is—*what manner of people ought we to be among whom Jehovah dwells?* It must have been a very solemn thing to be a member of that great camp of two millions in the wilderness of Sinai. God's presence in the midst of the camp must have made every tent sacred. As we walked through the streets of that canvas city, if we had been Israelites, and in our right minds, we should have said, "These tents are none other than the house of God and the very gate of heaven ; for see, Jehovah is in the midst of us. Mark you not the bright light that shines above his sanctuary?" We should have felt that in such a camp all should be holy. The pollution of sin should be unknown there. In such a camp constant prayer and praise should be presented to him whose presence was its glory and defence. To-day let our congregation be a holy convocation ; and as for ourselves, let us be holiness unto the Lord. We are consecrated men and women, seeing the Lord has come so very near to us. I spoke of solemnity ; I meant not dread and sorrow, but a solemnity full of joy. It is a solemn thing to have God so near, but the joy is equal to the solemnity. Glory be unto God most high, for he is here! Let us spend our days and nights in gladness and delight. God is reconciled to us in the person of his dear Son, and we have fellowship with God in Christ Jesus ; wherefore let us rejoice evermore. Amen and amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus xxxiv. 1—8; xl. 34—38 ; John i. 1—18.

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A Sermon

SUGGESTED BY THE DECEASE OF THE EARL OF SHAFTESBURY,

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 4TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him."—Luke xx. 37, 38.

DURING the past week the church of God, and the world at large, have sustained a very serious loss. In the taking home to himself by our gracious Lord of the Earl of Shaftesbury, we have, in my judgment, lost the best man of the age. I do not know whom I should place second, but I certainly should put him first—far beyond all other servants of God within my knowledge—for usefulness and influence. He was a man most true in his personal piety, as I know from having enjoyed his private friendship; a man most firm in his faith in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; a man intensely active in the cause of God and truth. Take him whichever way you please, he was admirable: he was faithful to God in all his house, fulfilling both the first and second commands of the law in fervent love to God, and hearty love to man. He occupied his high position with singleness of purpose and immovable steadfastness: where shall we find his equal? If it is not possible that he was absolutely perfect, it is equally impossible for me to mention a single fault; for I saw none. He exhibited scriptural perfection, inasmuch as he was sincere, true, and consecrated. Those things which have been regarded as faults by the loose thinkers of this age are prime virtues in my esteem. They called him *narrow;* and in this they bear unconscious testimony to his loyalty to truth. I rejoiced greatly in his integrity, his fearlessness, his adherence to principle, in a day when revelation is questioned, the gospel explained away, and human thought set up as the idol of the hour. He felt that there was a vital and eternal difference between truth and error; consequently, he did not act or talk as if there was much to be said on either side, and, therefore, no one could be quite sure. We shall not know for many a year how much we miss in missing him; how great an anchor he was to this drifting generation, and how great a stimulus he was to every movement for the benefit of the poor. Both man and beast may unite in mourning him:

he was the friend of every living thing. He lived for the oppressed; he lived for London; he lived for the nation; he lived still more for God. He has finished his course; and though we do not lay him to sleep in the grave with the sorrow of those that have no hope, yet we cannot but mourn that a great man and a prince has fallen this day in Israel. Surely, the righteous are taken away from the evil to come, and we are left to struggle on under increasing difficulties.

It must always be so. The godly must die, even as others. Though our life be perfectly consecrated, yet it cannot for ever be continued in this world. It is appointed unto men once to die, and that appointment stands. We expect the present rule to last till he shall come who shall destroy the last enemy. We are not troubled with Sadducean doubts; to us, seeing that Christ rose from the dead, it is a matter of certainty that all his followers must rise also; and seeing that Jesus ever liveth, it is equally a matter of certainty to us that all the saints are still living, for he hath said, "Because I live, ye shall live also." Yet, if no infidelity is permitted to creep into our brain and disturb our belief, it may penetrate into our heart, and cause us great sadness. We who believe in Jesus should rise into an atmosphere more clear and warm than that of the sepulchre; for the Lord Jesus hath "abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light through the gospel." We are not now sitting in the shadow of death, for eternal light has sprung up. Children of God, it is in the highest degree proper that you should think of things as your Father thinks of them; and he saith that "all live unto God." Let us correct our phraseology by that of Scripture, and speak of departed saints as inspiration speaks of them. Then shall we come back to the simple child's talk which Wordsworth so sweetly turned into rhyme—"Master, we are seven"; and in our family we shall number brothers, and sisters, and friends, whose bodies lie in the churchyard, and shall speak of those who have crossed the border, and passed within the veil, as still our own. Like Jesus, we shall say, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth"; like Paul, we shall speak of them as absent from the body but present with the Lord, and regard them as part and parcel of the one family in heaven and earth.

Our text was fashioned in a place which has the air of death, burial, and resurrection about it. The voice came to Moses in the desert. This was a strange place for Moses: the living, active, well-instructed mind of Moses, mighty in all the wisdom of Egypt, and full of noble thoughts concerning the living God, was buried in a desert. It is singular to see the foremost mind of the age in the remotest part of the desert, hidden away among sheep. He who was a born king is here feeding a flock. It is death to Moses. Rest assured that Moses cannot be kept in this living tomb; he must rise to life and leadership. While there is a God and a providence Moses cannot continue in obscurity. There are certainties wrapped up in him which cannot fail. A man need not be a prophet to stand at Horeb and prognosticate that Moses will emerge from the desert, and shake Egypt by his resurrection.

While Moses is in the desert he is thinking about another case of death, burial, and resurrection, namely, Israel in Egypt. The people of God, the favoured nation of Jehovah, with whom he had entered into

covenant, saying, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people"—these were in Egypt, ground down by relentless oppression, begrimed with brick-earth, and black and blue with the blows of task-masters. It has come to this, that they are compelled to cast their male children into the river, and so to be the destroyers of their own race. The children of Israel have become a herd of slaves; yet they are God's elect people, God's favoured family. It does not require a prophet to declare that this death in Egypt cannot last; the elect nation must live, and rise, and go forth free to serve the Lord. No, Israel; thou shalt never perish! The voice must yet be heard: "Thus saith the Lord, Let my people go, that they may serve me."

And so, while Moses in the desert is thinking of Israel in Egypt, he sees a bush, and that bush is all ablaze. An ordinary bush upon the heath needs only to be touched with a match: in one moment there is a puff of flame, and then all is over; nothing is left but a trace of ashes. Yet here was an extraordinary thing—a bush that continued to burn, and was not consumed. Here was life in the midst of death, continuance in the midst of destruction. This was an emblem of God abiding with a people, and yet suffering them to live; or of the fires of affliction being rendered harmless to the chosen of God. He who then spoke to Moses was the God of life, the God who could sustain in the midst of destruction, the God who could preserve even a bush from being devoured by the intense fury of flame. Said I not truly that the surroundings of Moses and the bush all favour a display of life in death, and resurrection out of death?

Now we come to the central matter. Out of the midst of the bush there came a voice, a mysterious and divine voice, which said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." From this voice our divine Lord teaches us to gather this fact: that God's people live when they appear to have been long dead; for he who cannot be the God of the dead, or non-existent, still avows himself to be the God of the long-buried patriarchs. Our Lord proved from that utterance at the bush the continued life of the Lord's chosen, and also their resurrection: how did he do this?

I. We will not go straight to the answer, but we will beat about the bush a little, that the reasoning may the more gently enter our minds. I would say, first, that in these words we have A GLORIOUS RELATIONSHIP DECLARED. Moses calleth the Lord "The God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

The glorious Lord did at the bush as good as say, "*These three men have chosen me to be their God.*" So they had; through the grace of God they had deliberately chosen to part with their natural kindred in the country of the Chaldees, and to journey to a land of which they knew nothing except that God had promised that they should afterwards receive it for an inheritance. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were three very different characters; yet this was common to the three—that they believed God, and took him to be their God alone. They nestled in the bosom of Jehovah while the rest of the world went after their idols. In all their troubles they flew to Jehovah; for the supply of all their needs they resorted alone to him. They were men who had through divine grace deliberately attached themselves unto Jehovah the Most High

throughout the whole of their lives. It is a sublime sight to see a man trust in God as Abraham did, and obey the Lord fully as he did in the matter of Isaac, when he accounted God to be able to raise him up even from the dead. Surely there must be everlasting life in a being who could thus confide in Jehovah. I call you to admire the fact that God called the patriarchs into the noble position of following the Lord fully, of fixed and settled choice. Being men of like passions with ourselves, they nevertheless cast in their lot with the Lord, and for his sake preferred the life of strangers and pilgrims on the earth to the comforts of settled residence in Ur of the Chaldees, and to the sinful pleasures of Canaan. We also take this God to be our God, even the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. There is a nobility about the choosers of the true God which will surely secure them from annihilation.

Next, these three men had learned to *commune with God.* How wondrously had Abraham spoken with God! Full many a spot was consecrated as "the place where he stood before the Lord." Isaac also walked in the fields at eventide; and, doubtless, there entered into secret fellowship with God. The Lord also appeared unto him at night, and led him to build an altar and call upon the name of Jehovah. The good old man even in his blindness found solace in communion with the Lord God Almighty. Jacob also was favoured with heavenly visitations. We can never forget that mystic dream at Bethel, nor the wrestling at Jabbok, nor the many times when he turned to the God of his father Abraham, and his father Isaac, and God spake with him as a man speaketh with his friend. It is a wonderful thing that the Lord should thus commune with men. He does not thus show himself to the beasts which perish; he does not thus reveal himself to the lifeless stones of the field. Those are strangely honoured beings with whom God enters into close communion as he did with these three men. I argue from it that these beings cannot dissolve into a handful of dust and cease to be. Can those eyes cease to be which have seen the Lord? Can those souls perish which have conversed with the Eternal? We think not so. But just now I ask you only to meditate upon the glories to which the patriarchs were lifted up, when they were permitted to be the friends of God.

What was still more notable, the Lord *entered into covenant with them.* He made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, which he remembered, saying, "Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thee." You know how the Lord swore to give unto the seed of Abraham a goodly heritage, a land that flowed with milk and honey. Now, it is a wonderful thing that God should enter into compact with man. Doth he make an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure, with mere insects of an hour? Especially, would he give his Son Jesus to die to seal the everlasting covenant by his heart's blood with mere shadows who are but for a little time and then cease to be? I am sure it is not so. If God makes men capable of entering into everlasting covenant with himself, there lies within that fact the clear suggestion that he imparts to them an existence which is not for to-day and to-morrow, but for eternity. Still, I wish you mainly to regard the glory into which manhood is lifted up when God enters into gracious covenant with it.

Moreover, to go further, these men were not only in covenant with God, but *they had lived in accordance with that covenant.* I do not mean that they had lived perfectly in accord with it, but that the main strain of their lives was in conformity with their covenant relationship to God. For the sake of that covenant Abraham quitted Ur of the Chaldees, and dwelt no longer in the land of Haran, but became a sojourner with God in the land of Canaan. For the sake of this he sent away his firstborn after the flesh, seeing it was said, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." These faithful men had respect to the recompense of the reward, and, therefore, they were not mindful of the country from whence they came out, neither sought opportunity to return. Jacob, the most faulty of the three, greatly as he erred in his conduct to his brother Esau, was evidently actuated by an intense faith in the covenant birthright, so that he ventured all things to obtain it. In his old age and death he was anxious not to be confounded with the Egyptians, or separated from the chosen household, and, therefore, he said unto Joseph, "But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace." This he made Joseph swear; for he must make sure of it. He was aiming at the promise, despite the errors that he committed in so doing. Now, doth God enter into covenant with men and help men to live in accordance with that covenant, and after all shall they miss the blessing? Shall it end in nothing? Hiding beneath the shadow of God's wing, shall they, after all, perish? It cannot be: they must live to whom God is God.

For this was the covenant, that *they should have God to be their God,* and that they should be God's people. O brothers, I do not know how to speak on such a blessing as this, though I live in the daily enjoyment of it. This God is our God. All that the Lord is, and all that he can do, he hath given over to us, to be used on our behalf: the fulness of his grace and truth, the infinity of his love, the omnipotence of his power, the infallibility of his wisdom—all, all shall be used on our behalf. The Lord has given himself over to his people to be their inheritance; and on the other hand, we, poor weak feeble creatures as we are, are taken to be the peculiar treasure of the living God. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels." "The Lord's portion is his people: Jacob is the lot of his inheritance." We are God's heritage, we are God's jewels, we are God's children, we are dear to him as the apple of his eye. We are to him as the signet upon his hand and the crown upon his head. He cannot have chosen for his portion a mass of corruption, or a handful of brown dust; yet that is what the body comes to in death. He cannot have chosen for his heritage that which will melt back into mother earth, and be no more found; this cannot be. The covenant hath within it the sure guarantee of eternal life. Oh what an honour it is that God should even say to you and to me—"I will be your God, and you shall be my people. Beyond the angels, beyond heaven, beyond all my other creatures, I reserve you unto myself. I have loved you with an everlasting love. I will rest in my love to you.

I will rejoice over you with singing." In this the Lord has highly exalted his covenanted ones, and raised them to great nearness to himself, and thus to glory and honour. What hath God wrought! What is man that God is thus mindful of him, or the son of man that he thus visits him! Angels are nowhere as compared with men, yea, cherubim with all their burning bliss and consecrated ardour cannot match with men who are in covenant with God. Blessed above all other beings are those who have Jehovah to be their God, and who are themselves the Lord's choice, and care, and delight. Each one of these points, if well thought out, will go to strengthen our belief that the saints must live, must live for ever, and are at this moment living unto God.

II. We now come to that matter more distinctly under our second head: here is ETERNAL LIFE IMPLIED; for "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

It is implied first in *the very fact of the covenant of grace.* As I have asked before—Doth the eternal God covenant with creatures that shall live only to threescore years and ten, and then shall go out like a candle-snuff? How can he be a God to them? I understand how he can be a helper and a friend to men of brief existence, but I see not how he can be a God. Must they not partake in his eternity if it be truly said, "I will be your God"? How can the Lord be an eternal blessing to an ending being? He has power, and he will give me strength sufficient; he hath wisdom, and he will give me as much of his wisdom as I am capable of receiving; must he not also cause me to partake of his immortality? How is he a God to me if he suffers me to be blotted out of existence? When David said in dying, "Yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant," his comfort lay in his belief that he should live in the everlasting age to enjoy the fruit of that covenant. How could there be an everlasting covenant with a creature who would cease to exist?

But next, *this covenant was made up of promises of a very peculiar order;* for in very deed the covenant that God made with Abraham was not altogether, or even mainly, concerning things temporal. It was not the land of Canaan alone of which the Lord spake to Abraham, but the patriarchs declared plainly that they desired "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb. xi. 16). Even when they were in Canaan they were still looking for a country; and the city promised to them was not Jerusalem; for, according to Paul in the eleventh of the Hebrews, they still were looking for "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." They did not find in their earthly lives the complete fulfilment of the covenant; for they received not the promises, but saw them afar off, and were persuaded of them. The temporal blessings which God gave to them were not their expected portion; but they took hold upon invisible realities, and lived in expectation of them. They were evidently actuated by faith in something spiritual, something everlasting; and they believed that the covenant which God had made with them concerned such things. I have not the time to go into this subject; you get it more fully explained to you in the Epistle to the Hebrews; but so it was, that the covenant blessings were of an order and a class that could not be compassed within the space of this present

mortal life: the outlook of covenant promises was towards the boundless sea of eternity. Now, if the Lord made with them a covenant concerning eternal blessings, these saints must live to enjoy those blessings. God did not promise endless blessings to the creatures of a day.

More especially, beloved, it is to be remembered that *for the sake of these eternal things the patriarchs had given up transient enjoyments.* Abraham might have been a quiet prince in his own country, living in comfort; but for the sake of the spiritual blessing he left Chaldea, and came to wander in the pastures of Canaan, in the midst of enemies, and to dwell in tents in the midst of discomforts. Isaac and Jacob were "heirs with him also of the same promises;" but they entered not into the pursuits of the people; they dwelt alone, and were not numbered among the nations. Like Moses himself, to whom God spake, they "counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." They quitted kith and kin, and all the advantages of settled civilized life, to be rangers of the desert, exiles from their fatherland. They were the very types and models of those who have no abiding city here; therefore, for certain, though they died in hope, not having received the promise, we cannot believe that God deceived them. Their God was no mocker of them, and therefore they must live after death. They had lived in this poor life for something not seen as yet; and if there be no such thing, and no future life, they had been duped and cozened into a mistaken self-denial. If there be no life to come, the best philosophy is that which saith, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die." Since these men put this life in pawn for the next, they were sadly mistaken if there be no such life. Do you not see the force of our Saviour's reasoning?—God, who has led his people to abandon the present for the future, must justify their choice.

Besides, *the Lord had staked his honour and his repute upon these men's lives.* "Do you want to know," saith he, "who I am? I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. If you want to know how I deal with my servants, go and look at the lives of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob." My brethren, as far as the earthly lives of the patriarchs can be written in human records, they are certainly full of God's loving-kindness; but still there is nothing so remarkably joyous and majestic about them from a natural point of view as to make the Lord's dealings with them appear to be specially wonderful. Others who feared not God have been as rich, and powerful, and honourable as they. Especially is the life of Jacob ploughed and cross-ploughed with affliction and trial. He spake the truth when he summed up his life in the words, "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." Does the Lord intend us to judge of his goodness to his servants from the written life of Jacob? or from the career of any one of his servants? The judgment must include the ages of an endless blessedness. This life is but the brief preface to the volume of our history. It is but the rough border, the selvage of the rich cloth of our being. These rippling streams of life come not to an end, but flow into the endless, shoreless ocean of bliss. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have long been enjoying felicity, and shall enjoy it throughout eternity. God is not ashamed to be called their God if you judge of the whole of their being; he would not have spoken thus if the visible were all, and there were no future to

counterbalance the tribulations of this mortal life. God is not the God of the shortlived, who are so speedily dead; but he is the living God of an immortal race, whose present is but a dark passage into a bright future which can never end.

Yet further, to bring out the meaning here, *God cannot be the God of the non-existent.* The supposition is too absurd. Our Saviour does not argue about it, but he says so most peremptorily! God is not the God of the dead—that cannot be! If Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob are reduced to a handful of ashes, God cannot be at this moment their God. We cannot take a dead object to be our God, neither can Jehovah be a God to lifeless clay. God is not the God of putrefaction and annihilation. God is not the God of that which has ceased to be. We have but to put the idea into words to make it dissolve before the glance of reason. A living God is the God of living men; and Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive.

This even goes far to show that the bodies of these saints shall yet live. God reckons his covenanted ones to be alive. He saith, "The dead are raised." He reckons them to be raised; and as he reckons nothing falsely, it is said by way of anticipation. "Thy dead men shall live." Inasmuch as a portion of these chosen ones is still in the earth, God, who reckons things that are not as though they were, looks upon their bodies as possessing life, because they are to possess life so soon. God is not only the God of Abraham's soul, but of Abraham as a whole, his body, soul, and spirit. God is the God of Abraham's body; we are sure of that, because the covenant seal was set upon the flesh of Abraham. Where the doubt might be, there is the confirming seal, namely, in his mortal body. There was no seal set upon his soul, for the soul had life, and could not see death; but it was set upon his body, which would die, to make sure that even *it* would live. At this day we have baptism and the holy supper to be seals as to the body. I have sometimes thought to myself that it were better if there were no water baptism, seeing it has become the nest of so much superstition; and the Lord's Supper, with all its blessed uses, has been so abused that one is apt to think that without outward ordinances there might be more spiritual religion; but the Lord intends that the materialism of man, and of creation, shall be uplifted; and that the body shall be raised incorruptible, and therefore has he given seals which touch the outward and material. The water wherein the body is washed, and the bread-and-wine whereby the body is nourished, are tokens that there cometh to us, not only spiritual and invisible blessings, but even such as shall redeem and purify our mortal body. The grave cannot hold any portion of the covenanted ones: eternal life is the portion of the whole man. God is the God of our entire manhood, spirit, soul, and body; and all live unto him in their entirety. The whole of the covenant shall be fulfilled to the whole of those with whom that covenant was made.

This is good reasoning to those who have gone beyond mere reason, and have ascended into the realm of faith. May the Holy Spirit grant unto us to be among them!

III. Thirdly, and very briefly, beloved friends: my text not only declares glorious relationship, and implies eternal life, but it also

unveils somewhat scantily, but still sufficiently, what the glorious life must be. Look then and see the GLORIOUS LIFE UNVEILED.

It is clear that they live *personally*. It is not said, "I am the God of the whole body of the saints in one mass." But "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob." God will make his people to live individually. My mother, my father, my child, each will personally exist. God is the God of saints, as living distinct lives: Abraham is Abraham, Isaac is Isaac, Jacob is Jacob. The three patriarchs were not all melted into one common Abraham, nor Isaac into one imaginary Isaac; neither was any one so altered as to cease to be himself. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are all literally living as actual men, and the same men as they used to be. Jacob is Jacob, and not an echo of Abraham; Isaac is Isaac, and not a rehearsal of Jacob. All the saints are existent in their personality, identity, distinction, and idiosyncrasy.

What is more, the patriarchs are *mentioned by their names;* and so it is clear they are known: they are not three anonymous bodies, but Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many enquire, "Shall we know our friends in heaven?" Why should we not? The saints in heaven are never spoken of in Scripture as moving about anonymously; but their names are spoken of as written in the book of life. Why is this? The apostles knew Moses and Elias on the Mount, though they had never seen them before. I cannot forget old John Ryland's answer to his wife: "John," she said, "will you know me in heaven?" "Betty," he replied, "I have known you well here, and I shall not be a bigger fool in heaven than I am now; therefore I shall certainly know you there." That seems to be clear enough. We read in the New Testament, "They shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven;" not sit down with three unknown individuals in iron masks, or three impersonalities who make a part of the great *pan*, nor three spirits who are as exactly alike as pins made in a factory; but Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. That is clear enough in the text.

That glorious life, while it is a personal and a known life, is also *free from all sorrow*, and misery, and earthly grossness. They are neither married nor given in marriage, neither shall they die any more; but they are as the angels of God. It is a life of perfect blessedness, a life of hallowed worship, a life of undivided glory. Oh, that we were in it! Oh that we may soon reach it! Let us think of the many who are enjoying it now, and of those who have attained to it during the last few days. I am sure they are at home in every golden street, and fully engaged in the adoration and worship of their Lord. Those saints who have been in glory now these thousands of years cannot be more blest than the latest arrivals. Within a very short space you and I shall be among the shining ones. Some of us may spend our next Sabbath with the angels. Let us rejoice and be glad at the bare thought of it. Some of us are not doomed to live here through another winter: we shall pass beyond these autumn fogs into the golden light of the eternal summer before another Christmas-day has come. Oh the joy which ought to thrill through our souls at the thought of such amazing bliss!

And now, taking the whole subject together, I want to say a few familiar things about the influence which all this ought to have upon us.

Concerning those that have gone before us, we gather from this whole text that *they are not lost.* We know where they are. Neither have they lost anything, for they are what they were, and more. Abraham has about him still everything that is Abrahamic ; he is Abraham still. And Isaac has everything about him that properly belongs to Isaac ; and Jacob has all about him that makes him God's Israel. These good men have lost nothing that really appertained to their individuality, nothing that made them precious in the sight of the Lord. They have gained infinitely ; they have developed gloriously. They are Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob now at their best ; or rather they are waiting till the trumpet of the resurrection shall sound, when their bodies also shall be united to their spirits, and then Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob will be completely Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, world without end. We are by no means deprived of our dear ones by their death : they *are;* they are themselves ; and they are ours still. As Abraham is not lost to Isaac, nor to Jacob, nor to God, nor to himself ; so are our beloved ones by no means lost to us. Do not let us think of them then as if they were lost. I know your sorrows make an excursion to the grave, to look there for the deceased ones. You want to lift that coffin lid, and to unwrap the shroud. Oh, do not so, do not so ! He is not here ; the real man has gone. He may be dead to you for a while, but he lives unto God. Yes, the dead one liveth, he liveth unto God. Do but anticipate the passage of that little time, which is almost gone while I am speaking of it, and then your Saviour's angels shall sound their golden trumpets, and at the welcome noise the grave shall open its portals, and resign its captives. "Thy brother shall rise again." Wherefore, comfort one another with these words. Shaftesbury is as much Shaftesbury as ever, and even more so. We have parted with the earl, but the saint liveth : he has gone past yonder veil into the next room, and there he is before the Lord of Hosts. He has gone out of this dim, dusky, cloudy chamber, into the bright, pearly light that streameth from the throne of God and of the Lamb. We have nothing to sorrow about in reference to what he is or where he is. So, too, your valued parents, and beloved children, and choice friends—they are yours still. Herein is great cause for thankfulness. Put aside your sackcloth, and wear the garments of hope ; lay down the sackbut, and take up the trumpet. Draw not the beloved bodies to the cemetery with dreary pomp, and with black horses ; but cover the coffin with sweet flowers, and drape the horses with emblems of hope. It is the better birthday of the saint, yea, his truer wedding-day. Is it sad to have done with sadness? Is it sorrowful to part with sorrow ? Nay rather, when joy beginneth to our friends, where glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land, we may in sympathy sing, as it were, a new song, and tune our harps to the melodies of the glorified.

I want you also to recollect that *the departed have not become members of another race;* they have not been transferred into another family ; they are still men, still women, still of our kindred dear ; their names are in the same family register on earth, and in heaven. Oh, no, no ! do not dream that they are separated, and exiled ; they have gone to the home country : we are the exiles ; they it is who are at home. We are *en route* for the fatherland ; they are not so far from

us as we think. Sin worked to divide them from us, and us from them, while we were here together; but since sin is now taken away from them, one dividing element is gone. When it is also removed from us, we shall be nearer to each other than we could have been while we were both sinful. Do not let us think of them as sundered far, for we are one in Christ.

And *they are not gone over to the other side in the battle.* Oh, do not speak of them as dead and lying on the battle-field: they live, they live in sympathy with our divine conflict. They have marched through the enemy's country; they have fought their fight, and taken possession of their inheritance. They are still on our side, though we miss them from the daily service. When you number up the hosts of God, you must not forget the godlike bands that have fought the good fight, and kept the faith, and finished their course. They are in the armies of the Lord, though not at this moment resisting unto blood. The hundred and forty-four thousand sealed unto the Lord include in their ranks all who are with God, whether here or in heaven.

> "One family we dwell in him,
> One church, above, beneath,
> Though now divided by the stream,
> The narrow stream of death."

Our sacramental host marches onward to the New Jerusalem. Certain of the legionaries have forded the dividing flood. I see them ascending the other side! The hither bank of the river is white with their rising companies. Lo! I hear the splash of the ranks before us as they steadily pass down into the chill stream; in deep silence we see them solemnly wading through the billows. The host is ever marching on, marching on. The much dreaded stream lies a little before us: it is but a silver streak. We are to the margin come. We shudder not at the prospect. We follow the blessed footsteps of our Lord and his redeemed. We are all one army still: we are not losing our men; they are simply ascending from the long campaign to take their endless rewards at the Lord's right hand.

What then? Why, then, *we will take up their work.* If they have gone into the upper chamber to rest, we will make up their lack of service in this lower room. The work they did was so human that we will not allow a stitch to drop, but take it up where they left it, and persevere in earnest. They are in glory, but they were not glorified when they were here. The work they did was done by men of such infirmities as ours; so let us not fear to go on where they left off, and perpetuate the work which they rejoiced in. There lies the plough in the furrow, and the oxen are standing still, for Shamgar, the champion, is gone. Will no one lay hold of the plough handles? Will nobody urge the oxen with the goad? Young men, are you idling? Here is work for you. Are you hiding yourselves? Come forward, I pray you in the name of the great Husbandman, and let the fields be tilled, and sown with the good seed. Who will fill the gap made by death? Who will be baptized for the dead? Who will bear the banner now that a standard-bearer has fallen? I hope some consecrated voice will answer, "Here am I; send me."

For, last of all, brethren, *we may expect the same succours as they received who have gone before.* Jehovah saith that he is the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; but he also saith, "I am the God of your father." The father of Moses had the Lord to be his God. That God is the God of my father, blessed be his name. As I took the old man by his hand yesterday, at the age of seventy-six, I could not but rejoice in all the faithfulness of the Lord to him and to his house. He was the God of my father's father also; I cannot forget how the venerable man laid his hands upon his grandchild, and blessed him; and the blessing is with him still. Yes, and he is the God of my children, and he shall be the God of my children's children; for he keepeth covenant to thousands of them that love him. Wherefore take courage, men and brethren! This God is your God. He is a God to you, and you are a people to him. Act as his true servants. Live as those that are elect. If you are his choice, be choice characters. The chosen should be the best, should they not? The elect should be especially distinguished above all others by their conversation and their fervent zeal for him that chose them. As you shall rise from among the dead, because the Lord Jesus hath redeemed you from among men, so stand up from among the dead and corrupt mass of this world, and be alive unto God, through Jesus Christ your Lord. What manner of people ought ye to be who serve the living God? Since the living God hath manifested himself so wonderfully to you, ought you not to live unto him to the utmost? God bless you for Jesus' sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus iii. 1—10; Luke xx. 27—30.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—855, 852, 844.

FIRST THINGS FIRST.*

An Address

BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

DELIVERED AT THE MONTHLY MEETING OF THE LONDON BANKS' PRAYER UNION, HELD AT THE EGYPTIAN HALL, MANSION HOUSE, LONDON, ON MONDAY AFTERNOON, SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1885; THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD MAYOR, M.P., IN THE CHAIR.

MY LORD MAYOR AND GENTLEMEN,—I was asked to give *an address* to the members of the Banks' Prayer Union, and to others occupied in banking; but I beg to warn you all that an address from me is very like a sermon. I am so in the habit of preaching, that almost of necessity my talk drops into sermon form. I have heard a story of a painter of signboards in Harp Alley in the olden times which illustrates the force of habit. An innkeeper selected an angel as the sign of his house, and asked this knight of the brush to produce one: but the painter replied, "You had better have a lion. I have been painting lions so long that they are more in my line than angels." Mine host answered that there were three or four lions of different colours in the street already, and that he must have an angel. "Well," said our artist, "if you must have an angel, you shall have an angel; but it will be dreadfully like a lion." Thus it comes to pass that when I am compelled to give an address it is extremely like a sermon. I pray you have patience with me now that I have confessed my weakness.

A philosopher has remarked that if a man knew that he had thirty years of life before him, it would not be an unwise thing to spend twenty of those years in mapping out a plan of living, and putting himself under rule; for he would do more with the ten well-arranged years than with the whole thirty if he spent them at random. There is much truth in that saying. A man will do little by firing off his gun if he has not learned to take aim.

Possibly I address myself to some who have hitherto lived at hap-

* This address has been a little lengthened in order to fill the usual number of pages. It has also been revised sufficiently to make it read much the same as it was heard. There were passages which depended so much upon the voice and tone that they could not be reproduced in letter-press.

hazard; and if so, I invite them to a more hopeful method of living. To have a great many aims and objects is much the same thing as having no aim at all; for if a man shoots at many things he will hit none, or none worth the hitting. It is a grand thing to know what we are living for, and to live for a worthy object with the undivided energy of our being. Shall we, when the end comes, have made a success of life? Has our object been a right one, and has it been wisely pursued? Are the results of our conduct such as we shall wish them to have been when the conflict of this mortal life is over? These questions deserve consideration at once.

Another question arises out of them—*What position should religion occupy in reference to a man's life?* That is a question which naturally arises in the arranging of life; for, whatever we choose to think of it, there is such a thing as religion in the world, and there is within us some yearning after spiritual things. We cannot help feeling that we need somewhat more than this visible world can offer us. Many of us find our greatest joy in the cultivation of that feeling, for it is to us the token of our spiritual nature, and the prophecy of immortality. To us this life is mainly worth the living because it promises to be the introduction to a better life.

> "Alas for love, if thou wert all,
> And nought beyond, O earth!"

Alas for life if this were all, and there were not a higher and better state of existence! No knell would be more doleful than that which signified the death of man's hope of immortality.

What position should religion occupy in your life and mine? The answer must depend very much upon another question—What is religion, and what does religion itself demand? What are the requirements of the great God, and of the soul, and of eternity? This question has suggested to me the text upon which I shall speak this afternoon:

"*Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*"—Matthew vi. 33.

I shall not trespass beyond the appointed time. However prosy I may be during the time allotted to me, I shall stop when the hour is complete.

HERE IS AN ACCOUNT OF WHAT TRUE RELIGION IS. According to the words of Christ Jesus our Lord, it is "the kingdom of God and his righteousness." Just now I read to you a portion of Scripture, Matthew vi. 24—34; and I read it to you, that you might note that our text occurs in the midst of a warning against undue anxiety. Undue anxiety is very common among city men, and it is not rare anywhere. Certain of us are nervous, timid, doubtful, and prone to fear. There are plenty of pessimists about, although they will hardly recognize themselves by that title. To them evil is always impending: we are about to take a leap in the dark. All their birds are owls or ravens. All their swans are black. If it rains to-day, it will rain to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, and in all probability there will be a deluge; or if it be fine to-day, it will be dry to-morrow, and so on for months, and the earth and all the meadows that are therein will perish with drought. As to the sun, they observe with pleasing despondency that he has spots.

His light they hardly notice, but they dote upon his spots with amiable horror. Minds of this sort

> Find poisons in trees, deaths in the running brooks,
> Dirges in stones, and ill in everything.

I suppose they cannot help it; yet Christian men *must* help it; for the Lord's precept is plain and binding: "Be not therefore anxious."

Fretful anxiety is forbidden to the Christian. In the first place, it is *needless*. Matt. vi. 26: "Behold the fowls of the air," said Christ: "they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" If you have a Father in heaven to care for you, are you not put to shame by every little bird that sits upon the bough and sings, though it has not two grains of barley in all the world? God takes charge of the fowls of the air, and thus they live exempt from care; why do not we?

Our Lord also taught that such anxiety is *useless* as well as needless; for, with all our care, we cannot add a cubit to our stature. Can we do anything else by fretful care? What if the farmer deplores that there is no rain? Do his fears unstop the bottles of heaven? Or if the merchant sighs because the wind detains his laden ship, will his complainings turn the gale to another quarter? We do not better ourselves a bit by all our fret and fume. It were infinitely wiser to do our best, and then cast our care upon our God. Prudence is wisdom, for it adapts means to ends; but anxiety is folly, for it groans and worries, and accomplishes nothing.

Besides, according to our Saviour, anxiety about carnal things is *heathenish:* "After all these things do the Gentiles seek." They have no God and no providence, and therefore they try to be a providence to themselves. As for the man of God who can say, "God's providence is mine inheritance," why should he pine away with trouble? Let the heir of heaven act a nobler part than the mere man of the world, who has his portion in this life, and lives without God and without hope. Our distrust of our God is childish and dishonouring. I was going through these streets one day, driven by a friend in a four-wheeled chaise, and he, being a good driver, must needs drive into narrow places, where it seemed to me that we should be crushed by the vans and omnibuses. I shrank back, in my timidity, and expressed my unwise alarms so freely, that with a smile he laid the reins in my hand, and said, "If you cannot trust me, would you like to drive yourself?" From that ambition I was wholly free, and I assured him that he might drive as he liked, rather than make me the charioteer. Surely, the great God might well put the same proposal to those who are complaining of his providence. If we cannot trust *him*, could we manage better ourselves? If we are men in Christ, let us believe in our God, and leave the governance of the great world outdoors, and of the little world within our own gates, to the Lord God, our heavenly Father, who will surely cause all things to work together for good to them that love him.

It is plain that within us there is a propensity to be anxious. Can we not utilize it? Can we not turn it to account? I think so. Some are naturally thoughtful and careful; can they not transform this tendency

into a benefit? We have a tendency to be anxious. Very well, let us be anxious; but let our anxiety run in the right direction. Here is a mental heat; let us apply it to some useful purpose. Our text sets before us *the true sphere of Christian carefulness.* "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." Seek *that* with all your care; seek *that* with all your energy. Be anxious about *that.* Let your whole mind run in that direction with eagerness and thought. You cannot be too careful or too energetic when God and righteousness are concerned.

In our text there is a description of true religion; what is it? "*The kingdom of God.*" Without using a single superfluous theological term, I may say that the great God has always had a kingdom in this world. In the olden times he set up a kingdom amongst his people Israel, to whom he gave laws and statutes; but now the Lord is King over all the world: "The God of the whole earth shall he be called." "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." God has a kingdom in this world, but it is too much neglected and forgotten of men. The first thing to be done by us is to enter that kingdom. Blessed is that man who has the Lord God to be his King, and has learned to order his life according to divine law. The highest liberty comes from wearing the yoke of God. The servant of men who dares not call his soul his own is a serf to be pitied; but the servant of God, who fears nothing but sin, is a man of princely mould. We must stoop before God, that we may conquer among men. If we determine to yield ourselves wholly unto the Lord, we shall become influential among our fellow-men.

We can only enter into this kingdom of God by being born again of his Spirit; for "except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." In that new birth we learn to submit ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to find in him eternal life. God has appointed the Lord Jesus heir of all things; by him also he made the worlds. He says of him, "Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little." Faith in Christ casts our sins at his cross foot, and brings us an inward life unto holiness. We must believe in Jesus, and trust in his great atonement for sin, for apart from his full atonement there is no salvation, and no true service of God. This faith puts us into the kingdom of God; for to "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." The first anxiety of every man should be to be a loyal subject of the kingdom of God.

And when we feel that we are reconciled to God, and are under his supreme sway, our next object should be to continue there, and to become more and more completely obedient to divine rule, so that we may more fully enjoy every privilege of the kingdom. In the kingdom of God every man is a king and a priest. He that serves God reigns. He that serves God is the possessor of all things. All things are ours when we are Christ's.

> "This world is ours, and worlds to come:
> Earth is our lodge, and heaven our home."

Let the Christian seek to know to the full what is the heritage of the saints in Christ Jesus.

Our next business should be to spread that kingdom—to try to bring others under the dominion of Christ. It should be the lifework of each man to bring others to own the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus. What opportunities most of you possess! Your station, your education, your wealth, all give you advantages for serving the Lord. Are you using them? It is a great joy to the Christian minister to have about him a people who are missionaries in their daily lives. With great joy have I listened to some poor girl who has confessed her faith in Christ, and then has added very timidly, "There is another girl waiting outside who would like to speak to you. She works with me in a warehouse in the City, and I spoke to her, and she sought Jesus, and I believe she is converted." I fear that many men of position are less diligent in winning souls than the poor workers they employ. Should it be so? He lives most and lives best who is the means of imparting spiritual life to others. May not some of you at the last come to a lonely end from lack of usefulness? We heard, not long ago, of the shipwreck from which a mother was washed on shore, but found all her children drowned. She telegraphed to her husband two words. The first was very pleasant to his eye: "*Saved.*" The next was full of misery: "Saved *alone.*" Ah me! would you or I like to have it so—"Saved alone"? God forbid. When we reach heaven-gate may we be able to say, "Here am I, and the children that thou hast given me."

This is the meaning of that first word—"Seek the kingdom of God." The reign of our Lord is to be our main object if we would lead a well-ordered, useful, happy, and honoured life.

Our text has a second word: "Seek first the kingdom of God *and his righteousness,*" by which I understand the practical part of true religion. Seek to have the imputed righteousness of Christ by all means; but seek also to exhibit the infused righteousness which comes of sanctification. Brothers in Christ, let us aspire after a high degree of holiness. We are called to be saints; and saints are not miraculous beings to be set up in niches and admired; but they are men and women who live, and trade, and do righteousness, and practise charity in the streets of a city, or the fields of a village. Those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb should not be satisfied with the common cleanliness of morality; but the garment of their life should be whiter than any fuller can make it. Purity becomes the disciples of Jesus. In spirit, soul, and body we ought to be holiness to the Lord. Our righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees: it should be a reproduction of the character of our Lord.

By the phrase "his righteousness," I understand that power in the world which is always working, in some form or other, for that which is good, and true, and pure. Everything in this world which is holy, and honest, and of good repute, may count upon the Christian as its friend, for it is a part of God's righteousness. Does drunkenness eat out the very life of our nation? Do you want men of temperance to battle with this evil? The Christian man cries, "Write down my name." When the slave had to be freed, the subjects of God's kingdom were to the front in that deed of righteousness; and to-day, if oppression is to be put down, we dare not refuse our aid. If the people are to be educated,

and better housed, we hail the proposal with delight. If the horrible sin of the period is to be denounced and punished, we may not shrink from the loathsome conflict. Let each man in his own position labour after purity; and, as God shall help us, we may yet sweep these streets of their infamies, and deliver our youth from pollution. Every Christian man should say of every struggle for better things, "I am in it, cost what it may." Hosts of your professors of religion forget to seek God's righteousness, and seem to suppose that their principal business is to save their own souls—poor little souls that they are! Their religion is barely sufficient to fill up the vacuum within their own ribs, where their hearts should be. This selfishness is not the religion of Jesus. The religion of Jesus is unselfish: it enlists a man as a crusader against everything that is unrighteous. We are knights of the red cross, and our bloodless battles are against all things that degrade our fellow-men, whether they be causes social, political, or religious. We fight for everything that is good, true, and just.

True religion is diffusive and extensive in its operations. I see people drawing lines continually, and saying, "So far is religious, and so far is secular." What do you mean? The notion is one which suits with the exploded notions of sacred places, priests, shrines, and relics. I do not believe in it. Everything is holy to a holy man. To the pure all things are pure. To a man who seeks first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, his house is a temple, his meals are sacraments, his garments are vestments, every day is a holy day, and he himself is a priest and a king unto God. The sphere of Christianity is co-extensive with daily life. I am not to say, "I serve God when I stand in the pulpit"; for that might imply that I wished to serve the devil when my sermon was over. We are not only to be devout at church, and pious at prayer-meetings; but to be devout and godly everywhere. Religion must not be like a fine piece of mediæval armour, to be hung upon the wall, or only worn on state occasions. No; it is a garment for the house, the shop, the bank. Your ledgers and iron-safes are to be made by grace "holiness unto the Lord." Godliness is for the parlour and the drawing-room, the counting-house and the exchange. It can neither be put off nor on. It is of the man and in the man if it be real. Righteousness is a quality of the heart, and abides in the nature of the saved man as a component part of his new self. He is not righteous who is not always righteous.

Undefiled religion is a vital matter; it is in the life of the man. I am afraid that the religion of some people is like the shell of the hermit crab. At sea the dredge brings up creeping things innumerable, and among them creatures which have their own natural shells to live in; but here comes a fellow who has annexed the shell of a whelk, and bears it about as if it were his own. He lives in it while it suits him, and he gives up the tenancy when it becomes inconvenient; the shell is not part of himself. Avoid such a religion. Beware of a Sunday shell, and a week-day without the shell. That religion which you *can* part with, you had better part with. If you can get rid of it, get rid of it. If it is not part and parcel of yourself, it is good for nothing. If it does not run right through you like a silver thread through a piece of embroidery, it will not avail for your eternal salvation.

I said just now that true godliness must be diffusive, and I return to the statement. I remember a remark of John Newton, once rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, across the road. He was a thoroughly Calvinistic preacher; but when one asked him whether he believed in Calvinism, he replied, "I am a Calvinist, but I do not take it as children eat lumps of sugar; I use it to flavour all my preaching, as men use sugar in tea or food." Hypocrites swallow religion in lumps, inviting all to admire the quantity; but sincere seekers after righteousness quietly dissolve their godliness in their lives and sweeten all their common relationships therewith. The real saint flavours his ordinary life with grace, so that his wife, and his children, his servants and his neighbours, are the better for it. Mr. Rowland Hill used to say that a man was not a true Christian if his dog and his cat were not the better off for it. That witness is true. A man's religion ought to be to him what perfume is to a rose, or light to the sun: it should be the necessary outcome of his existence. If his life is not fragrant with truth, and bright with love, the question arises whether he knows the religion of our Lord Jesus. The division between sacred and secular is most unhappy to both divisions of life: we want them united again. In the days of Queen Mary, a foolish spite dug up the bones of the wife of Bucer. Poor woman! she had done no ill, except that she had married a teacher of the gospel; but she must needs be dragged from her grave to be buried in a dung-hill for that grave offence. When Elizabeth came to the throne, her bones were buried again; but to make the body secure from any future malice of bigots our prudent forefathers took the relics of a certain Popish saint, who was enshrined at Oxford, and mixed the remains of the two deceased persons past all chance of separation. Thus Mistress Bucer was secured from further disrespect by her unity with the body of one of the canonized: I want the secular to be thus secured by union with the sacred. If we could only feel that our common acts are parts of a saintly life, they would not so often be done carelessly. If we lay our poor daily life by itself, it will be disregarded; but if we combine it with our holiest aspirations and exercises, it will be preserved. Our religion must be part and parcel of our daily life, and then the whole of our life will be preserved from the destroyer. Doth not the Scripture say, "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus"?

'But," says one, "are we not to have amusements?" Yes, such amusements as you can take in the fear of God. Do whatever Jesus would have done. This is liberty enough for one who aspires to be like Jesus. There is happiness enough in things which are pure and right; and if not, we will not do evil to find more. We find pleasure enough without hunting for it in the purlieus of sin. There are joys which are as far above the pleasures of folly as the feasts of kings are above the husks of swine. At times our inner life flames up into a blaze of joy; and if usually it burns lower, there is at least a steady fire of peace upon our hearth which makes our life such that we envy none. It is not slavery that I set before you when I say that we are first of all to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness: there is a present recompense which justifies the choice; and as for the eternal future, it pleads for it with voice of thunder.

It is time that I changed the subject, and dwelt upon a further theme. HERE IS AN ACCOUNT OF THE PROPER POSITION OF TRUE RELIGION. "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

Let the word "first" indicate to you the order of *time*. You know those venerable city gentlemen. I hope you reverence them as I do, since they are the embodiment of wisdom. One of these said to his son, "William, I am pleased to see you incline towards religion. But take my advice, and be reasonable. I have been in business now for forty years, and my advice is—stick to trade and make money, and then attend to religion." Now, the young man, as young men are apt to do, had begun to think for himself; and, for a wonder, his thoughts ran in the right groove, and therefore he replied, "Father, I am always grateful to you for your good advice; but this time you must excuse me if I differ from you, for the Scripture says, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,' and therefore I cannot go in for making money first, but I must at once serve God, and yet I hope I may be none the less attentive to business." It is a good rule to begin as you mean to go on. That son was wiser than his counsellor. My Lord Mayor will not say that he was wrong, I am quite sure; nor will any body here, who has tried what it is to seek first the kingdom of God while engaged in business. True godliness is as good for this life as for the next. If I had to die like a dog, I would still wish to be a Christian. Place religion first *in the order of time*. Begin each week by carefully consecrating the first day to rest and holy worship. Begin each day by giving the dew of the morning to communion with heaven. Begin your married life by seeking the blessing of the great Father, and choosing for a partner one that will agree with you in the fear of God. In opening a new business, sanctify the venture with the supplications of godly friends, and in all fresh enterprises be guided of the Lord. If we begin, continue, and end with God, our way will be strewn with blessings.

Seek also the kingdom of God first *in order of preference*. If it should ever become a choice between God and Mammon, never hesitate. If wealth and righteousness run counter to each other, let the gold perish, but hold thou fast to righteousness. Follow Christ, however dear it cost thee. Blessed is that man who never deliberates, because his mind is made up rather to "suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season." Blessed is the man who knows no policy but that of thorough consecration to God and righteousness—who is not careful to answer in this matter, but has his mind decided once for all. This is his motto:

> "'Tis done! The great transaction's done:
> I am my Lord's, and he is mine."

We have lifted our hand unto the Lord, and we cannot go back.

"Well," cries one, "but, you know, we must live." I am not sure about that. There are occasions when it would be better not to live. An old heraldic motto says, "Better death than false of faith." I am, however, quite clear about another necessity—*we must die;* and we had better take that "must" into consideration, and not quite so often repeat the cant phrase, "We must live."

But we *shall* live, brothers; we shall live without grinding the poor, or stooping to questionable finance, or lying to the public by a false prospectus. We shall live without dishonour. We young men—we shall live without lowering our colours to please those who jest at godliness. Here stands one who has run the gauntlet of public criticism for more than thirty years, and he has not suffered thereby; certainly he has not been forced to hide his faith, or recant his teachings. Silly stories, and jests, and sarcasms, have not killed us, nor even robbed us of our sleep. Younger brethren, never fear; if you are right, nothing can harm you. Take your ground and keep it. Say, "I shall do what I feel it right to do, God helping me." Any little difficulties which now arise will soon come to an end if you are firmly conscientious. Never be a coward.

> "I had as lief not be, as live to be
> In awe of such a thing as I myself."

Let none of us ever raise a question about whether we shall please or displease by doing right, but let us "seek first the kingdom of God."

Let godliness be first *in intensity*. It is to be feared that many give their force to their worldly pursuits, and their feebleness to their religion. They are "all there" during banking hours; but they are not "all there" at the hour of prayer. They remind me of one whose voice in our assemblies for prayer was exceedingly low, and well nigh inaudible; but in the shop he could be heard almost too well. Should it be so, that self should have our energies and Christ should have our lukewarmness? If ever we grow ardent and enthusiastic, it should be in the noblest of all causes, in the service of the best of Masters. In that work we cannot be too earnest; seldom enough do we meet with a person who verges upon excess of zeal in this matter. For him who has redeemed us with his precious blood we cannot do too much; our heart complains that we cannot do enough. Alas! the comparative sizes of the Bible and the ledger are frequently symbolical: a neat little Bible is buried under a huge ledger. I claim for things divine a different place; let that be first which is first; throw your whole soul into the love and service of the Lord.

"Is your father a Christian?" said a Sunday-school teacher to a child. The girl answered, "Yes, I believe that father is a Christian, but he has not worked much at it lately." No doubt there are many of that sort. Their religion has taken a holiday, and they themselves have gone up to a sluggard's bed. Let them be aroused, for it is high time to awake out of sleep.

Seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness first, by giving to true religion *a sovereignty over your lives*. The helm by which life is steered should be in the hand of God. To glorify God and promote righteousness should be our master passion. This Aaron's rod should swallow up all other rods. Be first a man of God: after that a banker, or a merchant, or a working-man. I like to see our public men first Christians, then Englishmen, then Conservatives, or Liberals, or Radicals, as their convictions sway them: but in any case let a man be first a man of God. I would to God that our politics, our merchandise, our literature, our art, were all saturated with this idea—"First a Christian."

Then the secondary character would rise in excellence and nobility. Science, social laws, trade usages, domestic life, would all be the better for coming under the supremacy of living religion. The fear of God should be the foundation and the topstone of the social edifice. "Christ first," and other things in their due order. Over and above all, let consecration to God shine forth even as the pillar of fire in the wilderness covered and illuminated the entire camp of Israel.

I may honestly claim five minutes more to complete the hour allotted to this service, and I will spend it by TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE PROMISE HERE MADE TO THOSE WHO "SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Does any one demand, "What will become of our business if we place godliness first?" The answer is in the text: "All these things shall be added unto you." A young man beginning life, resolving that he will do everything in the fear of God, and that as God helps him he will do nothing that is contrary to the mind of the Lord Jesus Christ—shall he prosper? He shall get on so far as this: he shall have bread to eat, and raiment to put on—all that is needful for this life "shall be added to him."

"Alas!" sighs one, "I am out of place, and I know not how to provide for myself and my household." Are you sure that this trial has come without your own fault? Then be not of doubtful mind, for the Lord will provide for you. He has said, "Trust in the Lord and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." David's experience was, "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken." The drunken, the vicious, the idle, the dishonest may suffer hunger, and it will be well for them if such discipline amends them; but to the upright there arises light in the darkness. They that serve God shall not have to complain of his deserting them. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a certain merchant of this great city was desired by her Majesty to go abroad for her upon affairs of state. He pleaded that his own business would suffer; whereupon her Majesty replied, "Sir, if you will mind my business, I will mind your business." Rest you assured that God will care for you if you make his service your delight. "All these things shall be added unto you."

The blessings of this life come to gracious men in the best shape and form; for they come by divine promise. Suppose that it were now put into the power of each one of us to be rich, I suspect that the most of us would be eager to avail ourselves of the opportunity; and yet it is a moot point whether it would be best for certain of us to have the burden of wealth. It is a question whether some people, who behave splendidly where they now are, would be half as good, or a tithe as happy, if they were lifted to higher positions. I have seen heroes drivel under the influence of luxury. Many are the creatures of circumstances, and make but poor creatures when their circumstances allow of self-indulgence. We do not know what is best for us. It is sometimes very much better for us to suffer loss and disappointment than to obtain gain and prosperity. When that eminent servant of God, Mr. Gilpin, was arrested to be brought up to London to be tried for preaching the gospel, his captors made mirth of his frequent remark, "Everything is for the best." When he fell from his horse and broke his leg, they were specially merry about it;

but the good man quietly remarked, "I have no doubt but that even this painful accident will prove to be a blessing." And so it was; for, as he could not travel quickly, the journey was prolonged, and he arrived at London some days later than had been expected. When they reached as far as Highgate, they heard the bells ringing merrily in the city down below. They asked the meaning, and were told, "Queen Mary is dead, and there will be no more burnings of Protestants." "Ah!" said Gilpin, "you see it is all for the best." It is a blessing to break a leg if thereby life is saved. How often our calamities are our preservatives! A less evil may ward off a greater. Many a man might have soared into the clouds of folly if his wings had not been clipped by adversity. Better struggle and be honourable than become wealthy by disgraceful deeds. Agur's prayer, "Give me neither poverty nor riches," was a wise one; but our Lord's is still better, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

"All these things shall be added unto you," and the measure of the addition shall be arranged by infallible wisdom. Temporal things shall come to you in such proportion as you would yourself desire them, if you were able to know all things, and to form a judgment according to infinite wisdom. Would you not prefer a lot selected by the Lord to one chosen by yourself? Do you not joyfully sing with the Psalmist, "Thou shalt choose mine inheritance for me"?

Does not the promise also imply that needful things shall come to the believer without vexatious worry and consuming labour? While others are worrying, you shall be singing. While others rise in the morning and cry, "How shall we live through the day?" you shall wake to a secure provision, and you shall have a happy enjoyment of it. Your place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks; your bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure. Contentment with your lot, and confidence in God, will make life peaceful and happy; a dinner of herbs with content will yield a flavour of satisfaction unknown to those who eat the stalled ox. It is better to be happy than to be rich; and happiness lies in the heart rather than in the purse. Not what a man has, but what a man is, will decide his bliss or woe in this life and the next. Oh yes, if God himself adds to you the things of this life, while you are serving him, the lines will fall to you in pleasant places, and you will have a goodly heritage.

The wording of the text, "All these things shall be added unto you," reminds me that the acquisition of property often decreases a man rather than adds to him. Have you not seen a man become visibly smaller as his riches grew greater? It is a wretched sight, which has often pained me. I have distinctly seen a man become "the architect of his own fortune" and the destroyer of himself. He has built up a palatial estate upon the ruins of his own manhood. It is a pity when a man bricks himself up with his growing gains. See you that hole in the wall. The man stands in it and greedily cries for bricks and mortar. Golden bricks and silver mortar he must have. They bring him the materials. He cries eagerly for more. He cannot be content unless he builds himself in. The wall which shuts him out from his fellow-men, and from the light of peace and true joy, rises higher and higher month by month, and year by year. His sympathies and charities

are bricked up, for the wall is more than breast high. Still he pines for more metallic material. At last he is built in, buried beneath his own gatherings, lost to all manhood through his accumulations. You see his house; you see his carriage and his horses; you see his broadcloth and his broad acres; but you cannot see the man. Heart, soul, aspiration, spirituality, it is all gone, and nothing remains but a vault of greed and care, to be itself buried under a monument bearing these words, "He died worth half a million."

A far more desirable idea is for a man to rise above his possessions, elevating life upon stepping-stones of these dead gains; building with them a pedestal, above which the inner manhood rises.

This is what God intends to do in providence to the man who serves him heartily; he will add to him the things of this life. These shall be thrown in as supplements to the divine heritage. I incur certain little outlays in connection with my study; we need a few matters which may be paid for out of petty cash; but I have never seen, as far as I recollect, a single penny for string and brown paper; because, as a reader and writer, I buy books, and then the string and brown paper are added to me. My purchase is the books, but the string and brown paper come to me, added as a matter of course. This is the idea of our text: you are to spend your strength on the high and noble purpose of glorifying God, and then the minor matters of what shall we eat? and what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed? are thrown in as supplements. Earthly things are but the brown paper and string; and I pray you never think too much of them. Some people get so much of this brown paper and string that they glory in them, and expect us to fall down and worship them. If we refuse this homage, they are foolish enough to adore themselves. It must not be so among the servants of God. To us the man is the man, and not the guinea's stamp. "All these things" are to us small matters; the real life of the soul is all in all. Do not slice pieces out of your manhood, and then hope to fill up the vacancies with bank-notes. He who loses manliness or godliness to gain gold is a great cheater of himself. Keep yourselves entire for God and for his Christ, and let all other matters be additions, not subtractions. Live above the world. Its goods will come to you when you do not bid high for them. If you hunt the butterfly of wealth too eagerly you may spoil it by the stroke with which you secure it. When earthly things are sought for as the main object, they are degraded into rubbish, and the seeker of them has fallen to be a mere man with a muck-rake, turning over a dunghill to find nothing. Set your heart on nobler things than pelf! Cry with David, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills whence cometh my help." Men and brethren, let us so live that it will be safe for God to add to us the blessings of the life that now is; but that can only be done with safety when we have learned to keep the world under our feet.

May the Lord enable us to live to high and noble purposes, that so we may meet in the glory-land, and hear the approving voice of Jesus, our Saviour and Captain, saying to us, "Well done, good and faithful servants."

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE NOBLEMAN'S FAITH.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 11TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"There was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son: for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told him, saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that it was at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth: and himself believed, and his whole house."—John iv. 46—53.

THIS narrative illustrates the rise and progress of faith in the soul. While I try to speak of it, I pray that we may experimentally follow the track, desiring that such faith may have a rise in our hearts, may make progress in our spirits, and may become even stronger in us than it was in this nobleman. The point, my brethren, is not to hear about these things only, but to have them repeated in your own soul. We want to come to real business, and to make the things of God matters of downright fact to ourselves: not only to hear about this nobleman from Capernaum, or anybody else, but to see in our own souls the same work of grace as was wrought in them. The same living Christ is here, and his help we as greatly need as ever did this nobleman. May we seek it as he sought it, and find it as he found it! Thus will the Holy Spirit, who inspired the narrative before us, be found writing it over again, not upon the pages of a book, but upon the fleshy tablets of our hearts.

Observe then, at the commencement, that *trouble first of all led this courtly personage to Jesus.* Had he been without trial, he might have lived forgetful of his God and Saviour; but sorrow came to his house, and it was God's angel in disguise. It may be, dear friend, that you are in trouble this morning; and, if so, I pray that affliction may be the black horse upon which mercy shall ride to your door. It is a sad, sad thing with some men that, the better the Lord deals with them in providence, the worse return they make. On the other hand, there are hearts that turn to the Lord when he smites them. When they drift into deep waters, when they can scarcely find bread to eat, when sickness attacks their bodies, and especially when their children are smitten,

then they begin to think of God, and better things. Blessed is the discipline of the great Father in such a case. It is well for the troubled if their tribulation bruises their heart to repentance, and repentance leads them to seek and find pardon.

The particular form of trial which visited this nobleman was the sickness of his child. A little son he had, whom he dearly loved, and he was down with a deadly fever. The father appears to have been a naturally kind and affectionate person. His servants evidently took a great interest in him, and in the domestic affliction which grieved him; for you observe with what eagerness they came to meet him, to tell him of the recovery of his child. The father's heart was sadly wounded because his dear boy was at the point of death. No doubt he had tried all the remedies known to the times, had sent for every physician that could be found within miles of Capernaum; and now, having heard of one Jesus of Nazareth, who at Cana had turned water into wine, and at Jerusalem had done many mighty works, he resorts to him with eager petition and desperate hope. He might never have thought of seeking Jesus if it had not been for that dear dying boy. How often does it happen that children, though they are not angels, yet are used to do better work than angels could accomplish; for they sweetly lead their parents to God and heaven! They twine themselves about our hearts, and then, if we see them sicken, and mark their pains, our sympathetic hearts are wrung with anguish, and we cry, "O God, spare my child! Lord, have mercy upon my little one!" The first prayers that come from many hearts are, under God, fetched forth by grief for little ones most dearly loved. Is it not written, "And a little child shall lead them"? It was so with this man; he was brought to Jesus by trouble; brought to Jesus by anxiety about a child. I have it strongly upon me at this moment that I am speaking to certain persons who are not converted, but they have come hither because they are in great sorrow: possibly a dear little one is pining away, and their hearts are crying to God that, if possible, the precious life may be spared. In the house of prayer they feel somewhat comforted; but their hearts are ready to break because of the loss they so much dread. How much I pray our Lord to make this trouble a means of grace!

Trial was the occasion, the preface to the work of divine grace. We will now proceed to look upon the saving part of it, namely, the faith which was born in this nobleman's heart. We will first spy out *the spark of faith;* then *the smouldering fire of faith*—much heaped over and damped, so as to be rather smoke than fire. Then, thirdly, we will look upon *the flame of faith,* or faith at length showing itself decidedly; and fourthly, *the conflagration of faith,* when faith at last blazed up in the man, fired his whole nature, and spread to his whole house—"And himself believed, and his whole house." Again, I say, let us try to follow in fact as well as in meditation.

I. I want you carefully to mark THE SPARK OF FAITH, all the while saying—I am going to look and see if I have such a spark of faith; and if I find it, I will prize it much, and pray the Holy Spirit to breathe softly upon it, that it may rise to something more permanent and powerful.

The faith of this nobleman *rested, at the first, entirely upon the report*

of others. He lived at Capernaum, down there by the sea; and amongst the newsmongers it was common talk that there had arisen a great prophet who was working great wonders. He himself had never seen Jesus, nor heard him speak; but he believed the report of others; and he was right in doing so, for they were credible persons. No doubt many are in the early stages of faith: they have heard friends say that the Lord Jesus receiveth sinners; that he puts away sin; that he calms the conscience; that he changes the nature; that he hears prayer; that he sustains his people under trouble: these things they have heard from persons of good repute, whom they esteem, and therefore they believe them. Friend, are you saying to yourself, "I have no doubt it is all true; I wonder whether it ever would be true to me. I am in trouble this morning: will the Lord Jesus help me? I have a present pressure upon my spirit: will prayer to him relieve me?" You cannot say that you know, from anything you have ever seen of him, that Jesus would thus bless you; but you infer that he will do so from what friends have told you. Well, faith often begins in that way. Men believe the report which is brought to them by well-known persons who have experienced the power of divine love, and thus at first, like the Samaritans, they believe because of the woman's report. In future time, they will come to believe because of having heard, and seen, and tasted, and handled, for themselves: but the beginning is good. This faith which comes of a report by others is a spark of true fire. Take care of it. May God grant you grace so to pray about it, that that spark may increase into a flame!

Observe that this faith was such a little faith that *it only concerned the healing of the sick child.* The nobleman did not know that he needed healing in his own heart; he did not perceive his own ignorance of Jesus, and his own blindness to the Messiah; he did not perhaps know that he needed to be born again; neither did he understand that the Saviour could give him spiritual life and light. He had little knowledge of the Saviour's spiritual power, and thus his faith had a very narrow range. What he did believe was that the Lord Jesus, if he would come to his house, could prevent his child from dying of the fever. He had reached as far as that; and such faith as he had, he turned to practical use at once. Friend, you do not as yet know how great my Lord is, and what wonderful things he doeth for those who put their trust in him; but you are saying, "Surely he could help me this morning in my present trial, and deliver me out of my present difficulty." So far, so good. Use what faith you have. Bring before the Lord the trial of the hour. Let me encourage you to do so. If you cannot come to him for heavenly things, you may, for the present, begin with the sorrows and trials of earth: if you cannot come to him for an eternal blessing, you may come to him for a passing favour, and he is ready to hear you. Though your prayer should only be about worldly things, and be nothing more than a merely natural prayer, yet pray it; for "He heareth the young ravens when they cry," and I am sure they do not pray spiritual prayers. All that ravens can ask for will be for worms and flies, and yet he hears them, and feeds them; and you, a man, though you may but pray at this time for a very commonplace mercy, one of the slighter blessings, yet you may pray with

confidence if you have any faith in the gracious Lord. Though that faith will be only a spark, and nothing more, I would not blow it out; nor will the Lord Jesus do so, for he hath said that a smoking flax he will not quench. If you have any desire towards him, and any degree of faith in him, let it live, and lead you to the dear Master's feet.

The nobleman's faith was so feeble that *he limited the power of Jesus to his local presence.* Hence his prayer was, "Sir, come down ere my child die." If he could but induce the Lord Jesus to enter the room where the sick child lay, he believed that he would speak to the fever, and the fever would be allayed; but he had no idea that the Lord Jesus Christ could work at the distance of twenty-five miles: he had no notion that the word of the Lord could operate apart from his presence. Still, it was better to have that limited faith than to have none at all. You, children of God, when you get limiting the Holy One of Israel, are guilty of gross sin; but if those who are seeking the Lord, through ignorance and weakness of faith, are found limiting him, it is far more excusable in them. The Lord Jesus treats it graciously, and removes it by a gentle rebuke. It is not the same thing for a beginner to be weak of faith as for you, who have enjoyed long experience of God's goodness, to fall into mistrust of him. Therefore I say to you, in whom the Lord is beginning to work, if you have no more faith than just to say, "The Lord Jesus could heal me if he were here: the Lord would help me, and answer my cry, if he were here"—it is better to have such a faith than to be unbelieving. Your narrow faith limits him exceedingly, and shuts him up in a very close place; and therefore you may not expect him to do many mighty works for you: and yet up to the measure of your faith he will go with you and bless you. As a matter of unpromised sovereign grace, he may even do exceeding abundantly above what you ask or even think. Therefore I would treat your faith like a little babe: I would nurse it until it can stand alone, and hold out my finger to help it till its tottering steps become firm. We will not blame the babe because it cannot run or leap, but we will cherish it, and urge it to greater strength; to which strength it will come in due time. Our Lord Jesus Christ deserves the largest faith from each one of us. Grieve him not by suspicions of his ability. Give him what faith you have, and ask for more.

His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, though it was only a spark, yet *influenced this nobleman.* It led him to take a considerable journey to find our Lord. From Capernaum he went up the hills to Cana, that he might plead with Jesus. And he went personally. This is the more remarkable because he was a man of rank and position. I do not know whether he was Chuza, Herod's steward. I should not wonder if he was, because we do not hear of any other noble family being on the side of Christ; but we do hear of the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, as amongst those that ministered to our Lord of their substance. We hear also of Manaen, foster-brother to Herod. It may have been one of these; we do not know: but noblemen were scarce birds in the church in those days; as, indeed, they are now. We naturally expect, therefore, to hear of such a person as this again; and as we have honourable mention of those two, we are not very rash in conjecturing that this nobleman may have been one of them. Now noblemen do not, as a rule, think of

taking journeys themselves while they have so many servants at their disposal; but this nobleman came himself to Christ, and personally besought him that he would come and heal his son. If your faith is weak in some respects, and yet strong enough in others to drive you personally to Christ, personally to pray to him, it is faith of an acceptable order. If it leads you to pray to our Lord with all your heart, beseeching him, then your faith is of the right sort. If it leads you to beseech Christ to have mercy upon you, it is the faith which saves the soul. It may be little as a grain of mustard-seed, but its importunity shows that there is pungency in it—it is true mustard. Dear sir, are you beginning to pray at this time because of sorrow? In the silence of your soul are you crying, "O God, save me to-day! I have come up to London to see other things, and I have dropped in here this morning: oh, that this may be the day in which I shall be helped out of my trouble, and myself be saved"? If your faith brings you to prayer, it is the acknowledged child of grace; for true-born faith always cries. If your faith helps you to lay hold of Jesus with a resolute grip, saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me," it may be little faith, but it is true faith. It is wrought in your soul by the Spirit of God, and it will bring a blessing with it. You shall be saved by this faith, to our Lord's glory, and to your own comfort.

I notice that *this man's faith taught him how to pray in the right style.* Notice the argument he used: he besought him that he would come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. He urged no merit, but pleaded the misery of the case. He did not plead that the boy was of noble birth—that would have been very bad pleading with Jesus; nor did he urge that he was a lovely child—that would have been a sorry argument; but he pleaded that he was at the point of death. His extremity was his reason for urgency: the child was at death's door; therefore his father begs that mercy's door may open. When you, my friend, are taught by grace to pray aright, you will urge those facts which reveal your own danger and distress, and not those which would make you appear rich and righteous. Remember how David prayed. "Lord," he said, "pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." That is evangelical pleading. Most men would have said, "Lord, pardon mine iniquity, for it was excusable, and by no means reached to the heinousness of my fellow-men." David knew better. His cry is, "Pardon mine iniquity; for it is great." Plead with God, poor sinner, the greatness of your necessity, the direness of your need; say that you are at the point of death, say that the matter about which you plead is a matter of life and death: this will be an argument calculated to move the heart of infinite compassion. Any tint of goodness that your pride would tempt you to throw into the picture would spoil it: lay on the black colours thick and three-fold. Plead with God for his mercy's sake, for mercy is the only attribute which you can hopefully address while you are a sinner unforgiven. You cannot ask the Lord to bless you because of any desert or merit you have, for you have no trace of any such thing; but you will be wise to plead your necessities. Cry, "O God, have mercy upon me, for I need mercy!" State your child's case, and say, "For he is at the point of death." This is the key which opens the door of mercy.

Do you follow me, dear hearers, you that are not yet converted? Is there, at any rate, in you some desire to come to the Lord Jesus Christ, though it be only because a temporal trouble is pressing you sorely? A horse does not want a dozen spurs to make it run. The one which now wounds your flank is sharp enough, and it is plunged in so deep that you must feel it. Yield to it, lest there should be need of whip as well as spur to make you stir. If you are the Lord's chosen, you will have to come, and the more readily you do so the better will it be for you. Come at once. Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding; but come to Jesus while he gently draws. Though it be with such a feeble faith that you fear it is rather unbelief than faith, yet draw nigh to him. Come just as you are, and look up to Jesus, and pray; for in that prayer shall lie the hope, nay, the certainty of relief. The great heart of Jesus will feel your prayer, and say, "Go in peace."

II. Thus have we seen faith in the spark: we will now look at THE FIRE OF FAITH, struggling to maintain itself, and gradually increasing. Let us see how the fire smoulders, and the heap begins to smoke, and thus betrays the inner fire.

This man's faith was true as far as it went. That is a great thing to say. He stood before the Saviour resolved not to go away from him; his only hope for his child's life was in this great Prophet of Nazareth, and therefore he did not intend to leave him till his request was granted. He does not at first get the answer that he wants, but he perseveres, and pleads on. This showed that his faith had heart and vitality in it. It was no whim, nor sudden impulse, but a real persuasion of the power of Jesus to heal. What a mercy to be delivered from all sham faith! Better to have little faith, and that faith real, than to possess a great creed, and give the Lord Jesus no hearty credit. Tell me, my hearer, have you any real practical faith in the Lord Jesus?

His faith was true as far as it went: but *it was hindered by a desire for signs and wonders.* Our Lord therefore gently chided him, saying, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." Now I know that many of you believe that the Lord Jesus can save, but you have fixed in your mind the way in which he must do it. You have been reading certain religious biographies, and you find that such a man was driven to despair, had horrible thoughts, and so on: therefore you settle it in your minds that you must have similar horrors, or you will be lost. You lay it down as a programme that you must be saved in that way, or not at all. Is this right? Is this wise? Do you mean to dictate to the Lord?

Perhaps you have read or heard that certain eminent persons were converted through singular dreams, or by remarkable movements of providence, and you say to yourself, "Something equally singular must happen to me, or I will not believe in the Lord Jesus." In this you err like the nobleman. He expected the Saviour to come down to the house, and perform some act peculiar to his prophetic office. In fact, this nobleman is the New Testament reproduction of Naaman in the Old Testament. You remember how Naaman said, "Behold, I thought, he would surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper."

Naaman had planned it all in his own mind, and had no doubt arranged a very proper and artistic performance; and, therefore, when the prophet simply said, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times," he could not receive so simple and bald a gospel: it was too common-place, too free from ritual. Many persons, by their mental prejudices, would bind down the Lord of mercy to such and such a way of saving them; but our Lord will not be thus laid under constraint; why should he? He will save whom he wills, and he will save as he wills. His gospel is not, "Suffer so much horror and despair, and live"; but, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." He comes to many, and calls them effectually, by the soft whispers of his love: they do but trust him, and they enter into immediate rest. With little striking feeling, either horrible, or ecstatic, they quietly exercise a childlike confidence in their crucified Lord, and they find eternal life. Why should it not be so with you? Why should you keep yourself out of comfort by laying down a programme, and demanding that the free Spirit should pay attention to it? Let him save you as he wills. Away with foolish prejudices!

Yet this is to be said of the nobleman's faith: *it could endure a rebuff.* Think of the Master only saying to this poor anguished father, "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe." It was sadly true, but it sounded honestly sharp. Oh, the dear lips of Jesus; they are always like lilies, dropping sweet-smelling myrrh! Myrrh, you know, is bitter to the taste, and there was a seeming bitterness about this speech to the nobleman; yet the father did not give up his suit, and turn on his heel, and say, "He treats me hardly." He said within himself, "to whom should I go?" and therefore he went not away. He was like that woman for whom the Lord's lips dropped a far more pungent morsel of myrrh, as he said, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." Yet she found a sweet smell in that myrrh, and perfumed her prayer with it as she said, "Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." This man answered our Lord by still greater importunity. He would not go away; not he. Oh, dear heart, may you have such faith in Christ that, though he should rebuke you, you will not leave him! Jesus is your only hope; therefore do not turn away from him. Imitate Bunyan when he spake words to this effect:—"I was driven to such straits that I must of necessity go to Jesus; and if he had met me with a drawn sword in his hand, I would sooner have thrown myself upon the edge of his sword than have gone away from him; for I knew him to be my last hope." O soul, cling to thy Lord, come what may!

Then see *how passionately this man pleaded.* He cried, "Sir, come down ere my child die"; as much as if he had said, "Lord, do not question me just now about my faith. O my Lord, I pray thee do not think of me at all, but heal my dear child, or he will be dead! He was at the point of death when I left him: do hasten down and save him." Limited was that faith, for he still asks Christ to come down, and seems to think it essential that our Lord should make a journey to Capernaum to work the cure; but note how intense, how eager, how persevering was his pleading. If his faith failed in breadth, it excelled in force. Dear anxious friend, keep close to the example now before us. Pray, and

pray again; hold on, and hold out; cry on, and cry out; never cease till the Lord of love grants you an answer of peace.

III. We come to a higher stage, and watch THE FLAME OF FAITH. The spark increased as a smouldering fire, and now the fire reveals itself in flame. Observe that Jesus said to the petitioner, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." And the man truly believed, and went his way.

Here note that *he believed the word of Jesus over the head of all his former prejudices.* He had thought only that Christ could heal if he came down to Capernaum; but now he believes, though Jesus remains where he is, and only speaks the word. Friend, wilt thou, at this moment, believe the Lord Jesus Christ on his bare word? Without laying down any rules as to how he will save thee, wilt thou trust him? Thou hast prescribed dark convictions, or vivid dreams, or strange sensations; wilt thou cease from such folly? Wilt thou believe in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Scriptures? Wilt thou believe that he can and will save thee now upon thy simple trust? Hast thou not heard of his passion, and death upon the cross for the guilty? Hast thou not heard it said that all manner of sin and of iniquity shall be forgiven unto men if they believe in him? Dost thou not know that he that believeth in him hath everlasting life? Wilt thou have done with thy nonsense about "Come down, and save me," or "Make me feel this, and I will believe thee"? Wilt thou believe in him now, despite all thy former thoughts, and pretensions, and desires, and just say, "I will trust my soul with Christ, believing that he can save me"? Thou shalt be saved as surely as thou dost thus trust.

The next thing this man did to prove the sincerity of his faith was that *he at once obeyed Christ.* Jesus said to him, "Go thy way"; that is, "Go home"—"thy son liveth." If the man had not believed the word he would have lingered there, and kept on pleading, and looking for favourable signs; but as he has believed, he is satisfied with the word of the Lord, and goes his way without another word. "Thy son liveth" is enough for him. Many of you have said, when you have heard the gospel preached, "You tell us to believe in Christ; but we will continue in prayer." That is not what the gospel commands you. Do I hear you say, "I shall continue to read my Bible, and attend the means of grace"? That is not the precept of the Saviour. Are you not satisfied with his word? Will you not take that word, and go your way? If you believe in him, you will go your way in peace: you will believe that he has saved you, and act as if you knew it to be true. You will joy and rejoice in the fact that you are saved. You will not stop to cavil, and to question, and to follow after all kinds of religious experiences and feelings; but you will exclaim, "He tells me to believe him, and I believe him. He says, 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life'; and I do believe in him, and therefore I have everlasting life. I may not feel any peculiar emotion, but I have eternal life. Whether I see my salvation or not, I am saved. It is written, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth.' Lord, I have looked, and I am saved. My reason for believing it is that thou hast said it. I have done as thou hast bidden me, and thou wilt keep thy promise." This mode of reasoning is due to the Lord Jesus. He deserves to be taken at his word, and trusted in real earnest.

Now, the nobleman's faith has flamed up indeed. He believes not upon mere report, but upon the word of Jesus. He does not wait for a sign, but he hears the word, and on that word he hangs his confidence. Jesus said, "Thy son liveth; go thy way": and he goes his way, that he may find his son alive. O seeking soul, may God, the Holy Spirit, bring you to this state at once, that you may now say, "O Lord, I will wait no longer for any sort of feeling, or evidence, or sign, but on the word thy blood hath sealed I will trust my everlasting all, for I do now accept thy promise, and since I believe it, I will go my way in peace."

Still, I am bound to say concerning this man's faith at this stage, that *it still fell somewhat short of what it might have been.* It was a great thing for him to have come so far; but he had farther yet to go. He expected less than he might have expected, and therefore, when he saw his servants, he asked them when the dear child began to amend. He was overjoyed when they virtually said, "He never did begin to amend; the fever left him all at once; at the seventh hour he recovered." You see he expected a gradual restoration. He looked for the ordinary course of nature; but here was a miraculous work. He received far more than he reckoned on. How little we know of Christ, and how little we believe in him even when we do trust him! We measure his boundless treasure by our scanty purses. Yet the faith that saves is not always full-grown: there is room for us to believe more, and to expect more, of our blessed Lord. Oh, that we would do so!

But one thing I want to mention here, though I do not quite understand it; perhaps you can make it out. *The father travelled with the leisure of confidence.* It was about twenty-five or thirty miles to Capernaum, and I have no doubt the good man started off directly the Master said, "Go thy way." No doubt he would go at once in obedience to such a command, and make progress on the road home. But we read that the servants met him. Did they start as soon as the child was cured? If so, they might meet him half-way, or thereabouts. It was uphill: say, therefore, that they came ten miles; and that fifteen, or even twenty, remained for the nobleman to travel. The servants said, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." The seventh hour was about one o'clock in the day, and that day was "yesterday." I know that the day closed at set of sun, yet one would hardly talk of "yesterday" without a night between. Did he take fifteen or sixteen hours for that part journey? If so, he did not travel with any excessive speed. It is true that twenty-five miles was a good day's journey for a camel, for in the East the roads are execrable; but still it does seem to me that the happy father moved with the ease of a believer rather than with the hurry of an anxious parent. A nobleman's usual progress through the villages was slow, and he did not alter the usual pace, because he would not even seem to hurry now that his mind was believingly at rest. He felt quite sure that his son was all right, and therefore the fever of anxiety left the father, even as the fever had left his child. Anxious minds, even when they believe, are in a hurry to see; but this good man was so sure that he would not allow parental love to make him act as if the shadow of a doubt remained. It is written, "He that believeth shall not make haste"; and in him it was literally fulfilled. He journeyed on in such style as a member of the royal household would be

expected to travel in accompanied by a fitting retinue, and thus all saw that his mind was at ease about his son. I like this consecrated restfulness; it befits a solid faith. I want you all, when you believe in Jesus Christ, to believe right up to the hilt. Give him not a half faith, but a whole faith; whether about a child, or about yourself, believe in earnest. Say, "'Let God be true, but every man a liar.' On his bare word my soul reposes. I will 'rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him.' What though no amazing joys flash through my spirit? God hath said, 'He that believeth on me hath everlasting life'; and therefore I have everlasting life. What if I do not rise up, and dance for joy? yet will I sit still, and sing within my soul, because God has visited his believing servant. I will wait until high joys shall come to me, but meanwhile I will trust, and not be afraid."

Dear hearer, are you accompanying me in all this? Are you ready in this manner to exercise a substantial, restful confidence in Jesus.

IV. So far the nobleman's faith has grown, but now we shall see it become THE CONFLAGRATION OF FAITH. As he went home, his servants met him with good news. In the quietude of his faith he was exceedingly delighted when they said, "Thy son liveth." The message came upon him like the echo of the word of Jesus. "I heard that," said he, "yesterday, at the seventh hour; for then Jesus said, 'Thy son liveth.' Another day has come, and, behold, my servants salute me with the same word, 'Thy son liveth.'" The repetition must have astonished him. I often notice about the preaching of the word, how the sentences strike you as to their very words when God blesses them. People say to me, "You said, sir, the selfsame thing that we were talking of when we were on the road: you described our cases even to our thoughts, and you mentioned certain expressions which had been used in our conversation; surely God was speaking through you." Yes, it is often so; Christ's own word finds many echoes from the mouths of his commissioned servants. The Lord's providence rules words as well as deeds, and makes men say the right words without their knowing why they say them. God is so graciously omnipresent that all things reveal him when they are bidden to do so.

Now the nobleman's faith is *confirmed by the answer to his prayers.* His experience has come in to the aid of his faith. He believes in a more assured sense than he did before. He has proved the truth of the Lord's word, and therefore he knows and is persuaded that he is Lord and God. The faith of a sinner coming to Christ is one thing; the faith of a man who has come to Christ, and has obtained the blessing, is another and stronger matter. The first faith, the simpler faith, is that which saves; but the further faith is that which brings comfort, and joy, and strength into the spirit.

"My prayer is heard," said he; and then he spoke to the servants, and *after enquiry his faith was sustained by each detail.* He cried, "Tell me all about it: when was it?" When they replied, "At the seventh hour the fever left him," he remembered that at that very moment, when over there above the hills at Cana, the Lord Jesus Christ had said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." The more he studied the case the more wonderful it became. The details were singularly confirmatory of his confidence, and by their means he rose to a clearer and firmer

faith. Brethren, how many such confirmations some of us have had! Doubters attempt to argue with us about the simplicities of the gospel; and they want to fight with us upon their own ground of mere speculative reasoning. Dear sir, this is hardly fair to us. Our own ground is of quite another kind. We are not strangers to the business of faith, but adepts in it; and you ought to allow something for our personal experience of the faithfulness of the Lord our God. We have a thousand treasured memories of happy details which we cannot tell you. We do not call you swine, but at the same time we dare not throw our pearls before you. We have a host of things laid by; but we cannot repeat them, for to us they are too sacred: thus we are not able to use those reasons which to our own hearts are the most convincing. We have other arguments than we choose to bandy in open court. Be not surprised if we seem obstinate; you do not know how intensely sure we are. You cannot argue us out of our secret consciousness; you might as well try to argue our eyes out of their sockets. We know, and are sure; for we have seen, and heard, and tasted, and handled of the good Word of the Lord. Certain things are so intertwisted with our lives that we are anchored by them. "Coincidences," you say. Ah well! say what you please; to us they are other than to you! Our soul has cried out, time after time, "This is the finger of God." A man who has been helped out of a very severe trouble cannot forget his deliverer. Do you reply, "You were fortunate to get out of it"? O sir; this seems a very cold-blooded remark!

If you had been where I have been, and experienced what I have experienced, you would own that the Lord stretched out his hand, and saved his servant: you would have the same solemn conviction as I have that God was there, working out salvation. I know that I cannot create those convictions in you by telling you my story. If you are determined not to believe, you will not accept my testimony, but will think me a deluded person, though I am no more apt to be deluded than you are. However, whether you are inclined to believe or to disbelieve, I am in no such hesitation. I am forced to believe, for the more carefully I examine my life, the more I am convinced that God must have been at work with me and for me.

At the same moment that Christ said, "Thy son liveth," the nobleman's son did live; the same word that Jesus used to the father was used also by the servants who had been thirty miles away; and, therefore, the father felt that something more than human had crossed his path. Do you wonder at it? Besides, that dear boy, whom he found sound and well, was a potent argument. You could not argue the happy father out of a faith which had brought him such joy. The child was at the point of death till faith received the word of the Lord Jesus, and then the fever fled. The father must believe: would you have him doubt?

Strengthened in his faith by his experience, after having believed the bare word of Jesus, the good man now sees that word fulfilled, and *he believes in Jesus in the fullest sense;* believes for everything; for his body, and for his soul; for all that he is, and for all that he has. From that day forth he becomes a disciple of the Lord Jesus. He follows him, not as a Healer only, nor as a Prophet only, nor as a Saviour only, but

as his Lord and his God. His hope, his trust, and his confidence are fixed upon Jesus as the true Messiah.

What follows is so natural, and yet so joyous, that I pray it may be true to all of you: his family also believe. When he gets home, his wife meets him. Oh, the delight that sparkles in that woman's eyes! "The dear boy is well," she said, "he is as well as ever he was in his life. He did not need to lie in bed for weeks to recover his strength after the weakening influence of the fever; but the fever is all gone, and the boy is well. Oh, my dear husband, what a wonderful Being this must be who has heard your prayers, and at all that distance has spoken our child into health! I believe in him, husband; I believe in him." I am sure she would speak in that fashion. The same processes which had been working in her husband had been working in her. Now, think of the little boy. Here he comes, so happy and cheerful; and his father tells him all about his fever, and his going to see that wonderful Prophet at Cana, and how he said, "Thy son liveth." The little boy cries, "Father, I believe in Jesus. He is the Son of God." Nobody doubts the dear child's faith: he was not too young to be healed, and he is not too young to believe. He had enjoyed a special experience, more personal than even that of his father and mother. He had felt the power of Jesus; and it was no marvel that he believed. Meanwhile, the father is rejoicing to find that he will not be a solitary believer, for there are his wife and boy also confessing their faith. But we are not at the end of the matter, for the servants standing around exclaim, "Master, we cannot help believing in Jesus, also; for we watched the dear child, and saw him recover, and the power which healed him must have been divine." One and all, they emulate their master's faith in Jesus. "I sat up with the dear boy," says the old nurse; "I would not go to sleep, for I felt that if I did sleep I might find him dead when I awoke. I watched him, and just at the seventh hour I saw a delightful change come over him, and the fever left him." "Glory be to Jesus!" shouted the old woman, "I never saw or heard of such a thing; it is the finger of God." All the other servants were of the same mind. Happy household! There was a grand baptism soon after, when they all went to confess their faith in Jesus. Not only was the child cured, but the whole household was cured. The father did not know, when he went pleading about his boy, that he himself needed to be saved; the mother, also, probably thought only of her son; but now salvation has come to the whole family, and the fever of sin and unbelief is gone away with the other fever. May the Lord work such a wonder as that in all our houses! If any of you are groaning under a burden of grief, I trust you will be so relieved that, when you tell your wife of it, she will believe in Jesus too. May the dear child of your care believe in Jesus while yet a child; and may all who belong to your domestic circle also belong to the divine Lord! Grant, at this time, thy servant's desire, O Lord Jesus, for thy glory's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John iv. 28—54.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—406, 603, 595.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL AND THE SCRIPTURES.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 18TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."—2 Timothy iii. 15.

How very remarkably the times repeat themselves! As I said just now, in the reading of the chapter, the warning which Paul gave concerning his own times is quite as needful for this present age. Again darkness thickens, and the mists hang heavily around our footsteps. Evil men and seducers wax worse and worse, and very many have turned away their ears from the truth to hearken to fables. Nor do we wonder that it is so. History must repeat itself so long as we have the same human nature to deal with, the same sins to ensnare mankind, the same truth to be trifled with, and the same devil to stir men up to the same mischief.

But, brethren, when the same evils come, we must apply to them the same remedies. When a disease appears which has done deadly mischief in past times, physicians enquire for medicines which on a former occasion curbed the enemy. We are bound to do the same in spiritual matters. We must see what Paul did in his day when the malaria of false doctrine was in the air. It is remarkable how very simple, as a rule, everything is that is really effective. If a discovery is made in science or machinery, it is complicated at first, and that for the very reason that it is imperfect; but all improvements are in the direction of simplicity. It is just the same with spiritual teachings. When we get at reality we cut off superfluity. Let us not talk of inventing wise measures for the present distress in the spiritual world, but let us use the great remedy which was so effectual in Paul's day. Paul taught young Timothy the gospel himself: he made him not only hear his doctrine, but see his practice. We cannot force truth upon men, but we can make our own teaching clear and decided, and make our lives consistent therewith. Truth and holiness are the surest antidotes to error and unrighteousness. The apostle said to Timothy, "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them."

He then dwelt upon another potent remedy which had been of

great service to the young preacher, namely, the knowing of the holy scriptures from his earliest childhood. This was to young Timothy one of his best safeguards. His early training held him like an anchor, and saved him from the dreadful drift of the age. Happy young man, of whom the apostle could say, "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"!

Brethren, to be prepared for the coming conflict, we have only to preach the gospel, and to live the gospel; and also to take care that we teach the children the Word of the Lord. This last is specially to be attended to, for it is by the mouth of babes and sucklings that God will still the enemy. It is idle to dream that human learning must be met by human learning, or that Satan must cast out Satan. No. Lift up the brazen serpent wherever the fiery serpents are biting the people, and men shall look to it and live. Bring the children out, and hold them up, and turn their little eyes towards the divinely ordained remedy; for still there is life in a look—life as against the varied venoms of the serpent which are now poisoning the blood of men. There is no cure after all for midnight but the rising sun; no hope remains for a dark world but in that light which lighteneth every man. Shine forth, O Sun of Righteousness, and mist, and cloud, and darkness must disappear. Brethren, keep to the apostolic plans, and rest assured of apostolic success. Preach Christ; preach the Word in season and out of season; and teach the children. One of God's chief methods for preserving his fields from tares, is to sow them early with wheat. Upon that I am going to speak this morning as the Holy Spirit shall help me.

In tracing the gracious work of God upon the heart of Timothy, and upon others who are favoured as he was, I shall notice that this work *commenced with early instruction*—"From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures"; and secondly, it was *quickened and made effectual by saving faith*—"The holy scriptures which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Then we shall notice that the effect of this early teaching upon Timothy was that it *created a solid character*, and, furthermore, that it *produced great usefulness*.

I. The work of God's grace in Timothy COMMENCED WITH EARLY INSTRUCTION—"From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures."

Note the time for instruction. The expression, "from a child," might be better understood if we read it, "from a very child;" or, as the Revised Version has it, "from a babe." It does not mean a well-grown child, or youth, but a child just rising out of infancy. From a very child Timothy had known the sacred writings. This expression is, no doubt, used to show that we cannot begin too early to imbue the minds of our children with scriptural knowledge. Babes receive impressions long before we are aware of the fact. During the first months of a child's life it learns more than we imagine. It soon learns the love of its mother, and its own dependence; and if the mother be wise, it learns the meaning of obedience and the necessity of yielding its will to a higher will. This may be the key-note of its whole future life. If it learn obedience and submission early, it may save a thousand tears from the child's eyes, and as many from the mother's heart. A special vantage-ground is lost when even babyhood is left uncultured.

The holy scripture may be learned by children as soon as they are capable of understanding anything. It is a very remarkable fact, which I have heard asserted by many teachers, that children will learn to read out of the Bible better than from any other book. I scarcely know why: it may, perhaps, be on account of the simplicity of the language; but I believe it is so. A Biblical fact will often be grasped when an incident of common history is forgotten. There is an adaptation in the Bible for human beings of all ages, and therefore it has a fitness for children. We make a mistake when we think that we must begin with something else and lead up to the Scriptures. The Bible is the book for the peep of day. Parts of it are above a child's mind, for they are above the comprehension of the most advanced among us. There are depths in it wherein leviathan may swim; but there are also brooks in which a lamb may wade. Wise teachers know how to lead their little ones into the green pastures beside the still waters.

I was noticing, in the life of that man of God whose loss presses very heavily upon many of our hearts, namely, the Earl of Shaftesbury, that his first religious impressions were produced by a humble woman. The impressions which made him Shaftesbury—the man of God, and the friend of man—were received in the nursery. Little Lord Ashley had a godly nurse who spoke to him of the things of God. He tells us that she died before he was seven years of age; clear proof that early in life his heart had been able to receive the seal of the Spirit of God, and to receive it by humble instrumentality. Blessed among women was she whose name we know not, but who wrought incalculable service for God and man by her holy teaching of the chosen child. Young nurses, note this.

Give us the first seven years of a child, with God's grace, and we may defy the world, the flesh, and the devil to ruin that immortal soul. Those first years, while yet the clay is soft and plastic, go far to decide the form of the vessel. Do not say that your office, you who teach the young, is in the least degree inferior to ours, whose main business is with older folks. No, you have the first of them, and your impressions, as they come first, will endure last: oh that they may be good, and only good! Among the thoughts that come to an old man before he enters heaven, the most plentiful are those that aforetime visited him when he sat upon his mother's knee. That which made Dr. Guthrie ask for a "bairn's hymn" when he was dying is but an instinct of our nature, which leads us to complete the circle by folding together the ends of life. Childlike things are dearest to old age. We shuffle off a portion of the coil that doth surround and hamper us, and go back again to our more natural selves; and therefore the old songs are on our lips, and the old thoughts are in our minds. The teachings of our childhood leave clean cut and sharp impressions upon the mind, which remain after seventy years have passed. Let us see that such impressions are made for the highest ends.

It is well to *note the admirable selection of instructors.* We are not at a loss to tell who instructed youthful Timothy. In the first chapter of this epistle Paul says, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." No doubt

grandmother Lois and mother Eunice united in teaching the little one. Who should teach the children but the parents? Timothy's father was a Greek, and probably a heathen, but his child was happy in having a venerable grandmother, so often the dearest of all relatives to a little child. He had also a gracious mother, once a devout Jewess, and afterwards also a firmly believing Christian, who made it her daily pleasure to teach her own dear child the Word of the Lord. O dear mothers you have a very sacred trust reposed in you by God! He hath in effect said to you, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages." You are called to equip the future man of God, that he may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work. If God spares you, you may live to hear that pretty boy speak to thousands, and you will have the sweet reflection in your heart that the quiet teachings of the nursery led the man to love his God and serve him. Those who think that a woman detained at home by her little family is doing nothing, think the reverse of what is true. Scarcely can the godly mother quit her home for a place of worship; but dream not that she is lost to the work of the church; far from it, she is doing the best possible service for her Lord. Mothers, the godly training of your offspring is your first and most pressing duty. Christian women, by teaching children the holy scriptures, are as much fulfilling their part for the Lord, as Moses in judging Israel, or Solomon in building the temple.

Nowadays, since the world has in it, alas! so few of Christian mothers and grandmothers, the church has thought it wise to supplement the instruction of home by teaching held under her fostering wing. Those children who have no such parents the church takes under her maternal care. I regard this as a very blessed institution. I am thankful for the many of our brothers and sisters who give their Sabbath-days, and many of them a considerable part of their week evenings also, to the teaching of other people's children, who somehow grow to be very much their own. They endeavour to perform the duties of fathers and mothers, for God's sake, to those children who are neglected by their own parents; and therein they do well. Let no Christian parents fall into the delusion that the Sunday-school is intended to ease them of their personal duties. The first and most natural condition of things is for Christian parents to train up their own children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Let holy grandmothers and gracious mothers, with their husbands, see to it that their own boys and girls are well taught in the book of the Lord. Where there are no such Christian parents, it is well and wisely done for godly people to intervene. It is a Christly work when others undertake the duty which the natural doers of it have left undone. The Lord Jesus looks with pleasure upon those who feed his lambs, and nurse his babes; for it is not his will that any of these little ones should perish. Timothy had the great privilege of being taught by those whose natural duty it is; but where that great privilege cannot be enjoyed, let us all, as God shall help us, try to make up to the children the terrible loss which they endure. Come forward, earnest men and women, and sanctify yourselves for this joyful service.

Note the subject of the instruction. "From a child thou hast known

the holy scriptures": he was led *to treat the book of God with great reverence*. I lay stress upon that word "*holy* scriptures." One of the first objects of the Sabbath-school should be to teach the children great reverence for these holy writings, these inspired Scriptures. The Jews esteemed the Old Testament beyond all price; and though unfortunately many of them fell into a superstitious reverence for the letter and lost the spirit of it, yet were they much to be commended for their profound regard to the holy oracles. Especially is this feeling of reverence needed nowadays. I meet with men who hold strange views, but I do not care one-half so much about their views, nor about the strangeness of them, as I do about a certain something which I spy out at the back of this novel thinking. When I find that, if I prove their views to be unscriptural, I have nevertheless proved nothing to them, for they do not care about Scripture, then I have found out a principle far more dangerous than mere doctrinal blundering. This indifference to Scripture is the great curse of the church at this hour. We can be tolerant of divergent opinions, so long as we perceive an honest intent to follow the Statute-book. But if it comes to this, that the Book itself is of small authority to you, then we have no need of further parley: we are in different camps, and the sooner we recognize this, the better for all parties concerned. If we are to have a church of God at all in the land, Scripture must be regarded as holy, and to be had in reverence. This Scripture was given by holy inspiration, and is not the result of dim myths and dubious traditions; neither has it drifted down to us by the survival of the fittest as one of the best of human books. It must be given to our children, and accepted by ourselves, as the infallible revelation of the Most Holy God. Lay much stress upon this; tell your children that the Word of the Lord is a pure Word, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Let their esteem for the Book of God be carried to the highest point.

Observe that Timothy was taught, not only to reverence holy things in general, but especially to *know the Scriptures*. The teaching of his mother and his grandmother was the teaching of holy scripture. Suppose we get the children together on Sabbath days, and then amuse them and make the hours to pass away pleasantly; or instruct them, as we do in the week-days, in the elements of a moral education, what have we done? We have done nothing worthy of the day, or of the church of God. Suppose that we are particularly careful to teach the children the rules and regulations of our own church, and do not take them to the Scriptures; suppose that we bring before them a book which is set up as the standard of our church, but do not dwell upon the Bible—what have we done? The aforesaid standard may or may not be correct, and we may, therefore, have taught our children truth or have taught them error; but if we keep to holy scripture we cannot go aside. With such a standard we know that we are right. This Book is the Word of God, and if we teach it, we teach that which the Lord will accept and bless. O dear teachers—and I speak here to myself also—let our teaching be more and more scriptural! Fret not if our classes forget what *we* say, but pray them to remember what the Lord says. May divine truths about sin, and righteousness, and judgment to come, be written on their hearts! May revealed truths concerning the love

of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Ghost never be forgotten by them! May they know the virtue and necessity of the atoning blood of our Lord, the power of his resurrection, and the glory of his second coming! May the doctrines of grace be graven as with a pen of iron upon their minds, and written as with the point of a diamond upon their hearts, never to be erased! Brethren, if we can secure this, we have not lived in vain. The generation now ruling seems bent on departing from the eternal truth of God: but we shall not despair if the gospel be impressed upon the memory of the rising race.

Once more upon this point: it appears that young Timothy was so taught as a child that *the teaching was effectual.* "Thou hast *known* the holy scriptures," says Paul. It is a good deal to say of a child that he has "known the holy scriptures." You may say, "I have taught the children the Scriptures," but that they have known them is quite another thing. Do all of you who are grown up know the Scriptures? I fear that although knowledge in general increases, knowledge of the Scriptures is far too rare. If we were now to hold an examination, I am afraid that some of you would hardly shine in the lists at the end. But here was a little child who knew the holy scriptures: that is to say, he had a remarkable acquaintance with them. Children can get that: it is by no means an impossible attainment. God blessing your efforts, dear friends, your children may know all of Scripture that is necessary to their salvation. They may have as true an idea of sin as their mother has: they may have as clear a view of the atonement as their grandmother can have; they may have as distinct a faith in Jesus as any of us can have. The things that make for our peace require no length of experience to prepare us for receiving them; they are among the simplicities of thought. He may run that readeth them; and a child may read them as soon as he can run. The opinion that children cannot receive the whole truth of the gospel is a great mistake; for their child-condition is a help rather than a hindrance: older folk must become as little children before they can enter the kingdom. Do lay a good groundwork with the children. Let not Sunday-school work be slurred, nor done in a slovenly manner. Let the children know the holy scripture. Let the Scriptures be consulted rather than any human book.

II. Our second head was to be that this work was QUICKENED BY A SAVING FAITH. The Scriptures do not save, but they are able to make a man wise unto salvation. Children may know the Scriptures, and yet not be children of God. *Faith in Jesus Christ is that grace which brings immediate salvation.* Many dear children are called of God so early, that they cannot precisely tell when they were converted; but they were converted: they must at some time or other have passed from death to life. You could not have told this morning, by observation, the moment when the sun rose, but it did rise; and there was a time when it was below the horizon, and another time when it had risen above it. The moment, whether we see it or not, in which a child is really saved, is when he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps for years Lois and Eunice had been teaching the Old Testament to Timothy, while they themselves did not know the Lord Jesus; and, if so, they were

teaching him the type without the antitype—the riddles without the answers: but it was good teaching for all that, since it was all the truth which they then knew. How much happier, however, is our task, since we are able to teach concerning the Lord Jesus so plainly, having the New Testament to explain the Old! May we not hope that even earlier in life than Timothy, our dear children may catch the thought that Christ Jesus is the sum and substance of holy scripture, and so by faith in him may receive power to become the sons of God? I mention this, simple as it is, because I want all teachers to feel that if their children do not as yet know all the doctrines of the Bible, and if there be certain higher or deeper truths which their minds have not yet grasped, still children are saved as soon as they are wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Faith in the Lord Jesus, as he is set forth in Scripture, will surely save. "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest," said Philip to the eunuch; and we say the same to every child: thou mayest confess thy faith if thou hast any true faith in Jesus to confess. If thou believest that Jesus is the Christ, and so dost put thy trust in him, thou art as truly saved as though grey hairs adorned thy brow.

Notice, that *by this faith in Christ Jesus we continue and advance in salvation.* The moment we believe in Christ we are saved; but we are not at once as wise as we may be, and hope to be. We may be, as it were, saved unintelligently; I mean, of course, comparatively so; but it is desirable that we should be able to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and so be wise unto salvation. By faith children become little disciples, and by faith they go on to become more proficient. How are we to go on to wisdom? Not by quitting the way of faith, but by keeping to that same faith in Christ Jesus by which we began to learn. In the school of grace faith is the great faculty by which we make advances in wisdom. If by faith thou hast been able to say A and B and C, it must be by faith that thou shalt go on to say D and E and F, until thou shalt come to the end of the alphabet, and be an expert in the Book of Wisdom. If by faith thou canst read in the spelling-book of simple faith, by the same faith in Christ Jesus thou must go on to read in the classics of full assurance, and become a scribe well instructed in the things of the kingdom. Keep therefore close to the practice of faith, from which so many are turning aside. In these times men look to make progress by what they call *thought,* by which they mean vain imagination and speculation. We cannot advance a step by doubt; our only progress is by faith. There are no such things as "stepping-stones of our dead selves"; unless, indeed, they be stepping-stones down to death and destruction; the only stepping-stones to life and heaven are to be found in the truth of God revealed to our faith. Believe God, and thou hast made progress. So let us pray for our children, that constantly they may know and believe more and more; for the Scripture is able to make them wise unto salvation, but only through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Faith is the result to aim at; faith in the appointed, anointed, and exalted Saviour. This is the anchorage to which we would bring these little ships, for here they will abide in perfect safety.

Observe, that the text gives us a plain intimation that *by faith knowledge is turned into wisdom.* Exceedingly practical is the difference

between knowledge and wisdom. See it in the text, "From a child thou hast known"; but it is faith, faith alone, that turns that knowledge into wisdom; and thus the holy scriptures are "able to make wise unto salvation." "Knowledge is power," but wisdom is the application of that power to practical ends. Knowledge may be bullion, but wisdom is the minted gold, fit for circulation among men. You can give your children knowledge without their having faith; but they must have faith given them of the Holy Ghost before that knowledge can become wisdom. Scriptural knowledge is wisdom when it influences the heart, when it rules the mind, when it affects the daily life, when it sanctifies the spirit, when it renews the will. O teachers, pray for your dear children, that God would give them faith in Christ Jesus, that so the knowledge which you have given them may turn to wisdom! Go as far as you can go with the teaching; but ever cry mightily unto the Lord, that his Holy Spirit may work regeneration, create faith, impart wisdom, and give salvation.

Learn yet again, that *faith finds her wisdom in the use of knowledge conferred by the Scriptures.* "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith." Faith never finds her wisdom in the thoughts of men, nor in pretended revelations; but she resorts to the inspired writings for her guidance. This is the well from which she drinks, the manna on which she feeds. Faith takes the Lord Jesus to be her wisdom. The knowledge of Christ is to her the most excellent of the sciences. She asks only—What is written? and when that question is answered, her difficulties are ended. I know it is not so with this unbelieving age; and this it is which causes me to go mourning and lamenting. Alas for a church which rejects the testimony of the Lord! As for us, we abide by the Word of the Lord, and from it we will not stir an inch.

See then, my hearers, what is wanted for all of you who are unconverted. The holy scriptures must be made the means of your salvation through faith. Know the Bible, read the Bible, search the Bible; and yet that alone will not save you. What did our Lord himself say? "Ye search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me; and ye will not come unto me that ye might have life." If you come not to Jesus, you will miss eternal life. Searching the Scriptures is able to make you wise unto salvation "through faith which is in Christ Jesus"; but not without that faith. Pray, ye Sunday-school teachers, that ye may see this faith wrought in the children whom you teach. What a blessed ground-work for faith your teaching of the holy scriptures will be; but never mistake it for the building itself, which is of faith alone.

III. Time fails me; I cannot dwell as I would upon other points; but I beg you to notice, in the third place, that sound instruction in holy scripture, when quickened by a living faith, CREATES A SOLID CHARACTER. The man who from a child has known the holy scriptures, when he obtains faith in Christ will be grounded and settled upon the abiding principles of the unchanging word of God. I wish it were so with the bulk of those who profess and call themselves Christians. In these days we are surrounded by unsettled minds, "ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth." These are carried about by

every wind of doctrine. What numbers of professors I have known who go into one place of worship and hear one form of doctrine and apparently approve it because the preacher is "a clever man!" They hear an opposite teaching, and they are equally at home, because again it is "a clever man!" They join with a church, and you ask them, "Do you agree with the views of that community?" They neither know nor care what those views may be; one doctrine is as good as another to them. Their spiritual appetite can enjoy soap as well as butter; they can digest bricks as well as bread. These religious ostriches have a marvellous power of swallowing everything; they have no spiritual discernment, no appreciation of truth. They follow any "clever" person, and in this prove that they are not the sheep of our Lord's pasture, of whom it is written, "A stranger will they not follow; for they know not the voice of strangers." We desire to build up a church with those who know what they do know, and can give a reason for what they believe. The true believer's great reason for his faith is, "It is written." Christ our Master met the tempter in the wilderness with, "It is written." Though he was himself inspired, yet his teaching was full of the Old Testament; he was always quoting the words of the inspired Book, and therein setting us an example. If you and I would contend with Satan, and with an evil world, so as to overcome in the conflict, we must take care to take our stand squarely and firmly upon the Scriptures. Let us treat our opponents to volleys of Scripture. Let us fire point-blank with sacred texts. These are arguments which wound and kill. Our own reasonings are mere paper pellets; but scriptural proofs are bullets of steel. Our opponents will find it useless to try to lead us away from the old faith when they perceive that we will not budge an inch from holy scripture. We are bomb-proof when we shelter beneath the Word of the Lord. The cunning craftiness of deceivers is foiled by the clear simplicity of "Thus saith the Lord."

Those who know the Scriptures, and so believe in Jesus, are pillared upon a personal acquaintance with the foundations of their faith. "From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures": they were not treated with an ignorant reverence, but with an intelligent homage. How much I desire that each one of you may be a personal student of the holy scriptures! We need to know them for ourselves. Personally grasping them as a revelation to himself, the godly man loves them, studies them, feels them, lives upon them, and so knows them. By this means he becomes independent of other men. Paul is to die. Poor Timothy! Yes, it will be "poor Timothy!" if he carries his faith in Paul's bosom, and has none in his own heart. But Timothy's Bible is not going to die. Timothy's knowledge of Scripture is not going to be taken from him; nor is the Holy Spirit about to depart from him. Look at some of our churches: while a well-instructed gospel minister leads the way, the brethren abide in their steadfastness. The good man dies, and where is the church? No doubt, those who are instructed in the Scriptures remain in their places, but the more ignorant are scattered like chaff. There are numbers now in this part of London wandering about, who were once zealous for the faith, but are now almost indifferent to it. I will not mention names, but I could do so readily enough—I mean the names of esteemed brethren who gathered an earnest following

about them; but they are gone, and with their going, numbers of their followers have gone, too. I fear there could not have been a sound knowledge of the Word, or these people would have survived the great loss of their teacher. Oh, to have a good personal building up upon the solid Word of God! then you will know what you do know, and you will hold fast to it, and there will be no driving you away from the standards of the faith. I labour for this among you, and I pray that I may not labour in vain.

The man that has been taught the Scripture from his youth is anchored by the divine influences of that Scripture. It has so operated upon him that he knows for himself its divine power. He knows the difference between truth and error by the effect produced on his heart and life. Without any boasting, he is able to discern between things that differ; because about scriptural truth there is a strange, mysterious unction, which does not attend the teachings of the most learned of men. I cannot explain to you what this unction is, but every child of God knows it. When I read a text of Scripture, even if I do not know it to be a text of Scripture by memory, I perceive its divine origin at once by a mystic influence which it exerts over my heart. The most striking passages of any sermon are texts well placed. A sentence from the mouth of God will have more permanent power over a Christian man, than the best composed of human statements. God's word is living, and powerful, and has a power to enter the heart beyond that of any other word. The words of the Bible strike and stick. they enter and abide. He that has been taught in Scripture, steeped in Scripture, saturated with Scripture, is conscious of its permeating influence, and it gives him permanence of conviction. Like the crimson dye in cloth, the tint of Scripture is not to be got out of the soul when once fixed there; it is dyed ingrain, it enters into the very nature of the man. Bible truth influences his thoughts, words, and deeds: it is all-pervading; he begins to eat, and drink, and sleep holy scripture. The man's heart is fixed on God, fixed in the truth, fixed in holy living. He will stand fast, however evil the days. Though all the rest should apostatize, this man cannot; for the divine Word through faith has bound him to the altar of the Lord, and in the truth he must and will both live and die, come what weathers there may.

Besides, a man that has once been taught in the Scripture, and to whose soul the Spirit has blessed that teaching, has come to yield himself to the supremacy of Scripture, and this must operate to the shaping of his character. I confess that sometimes I come across a text which does not at the first blush agree with other teachings of Scripture which I have already received, and this startles me for the moment. But one thing is settled in my heart, namely, that I will follow the Scripture wherever it leads me, and that I will renounce the most cherished opinion rather than shape a text or alter a syllable of the inspired Book. It is not mine to make God's Word consistent, but to believe that it is so. When a text stands in the middle of the road I drive no further. The Romans had a god they called "Terminus," who was the god of landmarks. Holy scripture is my sacred landmark, and I hear a voice which threatens me with a curse if I remove it. Sometimes I say to myself, "I did not think to find this truth to be just so;

but as it is so, I must bow. It is rather awkward for my theory, but I must alter my system, for the Scripture cannot be broken." "Let God be true, but every man a liar." We want our children to have this deep reverence for Scripture, even as we have it ourselves. There it stands: the eternal pen has written it: we accept it. If God has said it, we have no desire to question it, lest the Scripture should say to us, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" We must bow before the infallibility of the Holy Ghost, and say, "Lord, teach me what this means. What I know not, teach thou me." He who goes through the world with an intense reverence for Scripture will be a man indeed. The Lord will make good in him that word—"Them that honour me I will honour." Angels and men ere long reverence the man who reverences the word of God. Feed your mind on the pulse of Scripture, and, like Daniel and his comrades, your countenance shall appear fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children who eat the portion of the king's meat from the philosophic tables of the world.

While on this point I would also say, that this kind of instruction will hold a man fast against the differing seductions of the age. Here I go into one place of worship, and I see a pretty little dolls'-house at the further end, and people are bowing down before some paper flowers and candlesticks. Around the building I see pictures of virgins and saints; but he who has read his Bible enters not into this modern idolatry. A priest once said to a poor Irishman, "There will be no good come of your reading the Bible." "Why," replied the man, "it is written, 'Search the Scriptures.' Please, your Reverence, I was just reading 'Ye shall read it to your children,' and the priests have no children: how can you account for that?" "Ah!" replied the priest, "the like of you cannot understand the book." "Well," said the man, "if I cannot understand it, it will do me no harm; and if I can understand it, it will do me great good." Just so: the Bible is a very dangerous book to superstition, but to nothing else. Spread it, then, to the winds of heaven; and read it, every one of you. To the law and to the testimony; if we speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in us. He that holds to the Bible will be equally free from the dangers of rationalism which are now so abundant; and he will keep himself clean from the ravings of anarchy which now sound like the cries of dragons from the dark places of the earth. People are beginning to forget the commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," and they are planning various methods of political thievery, by which the foundations of society will be shaken. Love of holy scripture will be the sheet-anchor of the State as well as of the Church. If men are thoroughly grounded in holy scripture, we shall undergo political changes with great advantage; but if not, there is mischief brewing. That book is the corner-stone of our future hope.

IV. Now, lastly. As this early teaching creates a fine solid character, so will it PRODUCE GREAT USEFULNESS. I will say nothing more than just this. Thus Timothy became above all others a choice companion for Paul, one upon whom Paul looked with love, and remembered with joy. Companions for apostles are only to be produced in the school of holy scripture. Those who have communed with

Moses, and David, and the prophets, are fit to associate with an apostle. It is something to produce out of a child a comrade for a veteran servant of the living God. Let a man of God get side by side with a youth who knows the Scriptures, and he feels, "This is fit company for me." Paul, worn with years of persecution, strokes his grey beard, and his eyes light up with joy as he looks on that young Timothy. What is there about him more than about any other? Why, only that he knows the Scriptures, and they have made him wise unto salvation. There were, no doubt, fine young fellows to be found who gloried in preferring the advanced thought of philosophers to the stereotyped teachings of holy scripture; but had they begun to talk to the apostle upon their new theories, Paul would have dismissed them with words of warning. He knew nothing of them or of their "other gospel," except that they troubled him and the churches. Without a scriptural training a convert has no grit, no backbone, and no soul in him. But when Paul looked on a gracious youth who knew the Scriptures, and held fast to them, he thanked God, and took courage.

This young man became a minister and an evangelist. He was a preacher of such a sort that we should have been glad to have heard him. God send us many such! Perhaps we might have said, "The young man's opinions were rather crude, and his expressions were somewhat rough; but we can put up with that from so young a man. On the other hand, what a richness of Scripture there was in him! What depth of thought! Did you not notice he had not got through a dozen sentences before he had quoted a Scripture? and when he came to prove his point he did not give half-a-dozen rationalistic arguments, but he brought out a single word from the Lord, and the point was settled." You must agree with a man who is at home with his Bible. This is the kind of preacher that we need more of. Instruct your children well, beloved teachers, that they also may become scriptural teachers in due time.

Timothy became, also, a great champion for the faith. He came forward, and in the midst of all those who were preaching false doctrine he stood firm to the end; steadfast, unmovable, courageous, because as a child he had known the Scriptures. O teachers, see what you may do! In your schools sit our future Evangelists. In that infant class sits an apostle to some distant land. There may come under your training hand, my sister, a future father in Israel. There shall come under your teaching, my brother, those that are to bear the banners of the Lord in the thick of the fray. The ages look to you each time your class assembles. Oh, that God may help you to do your part well! We pray with one heart and one soul that the Lord Jesus Christ may be with our Sunday-schools from this day and till he cometh. Amen and Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Timothy i. 1—8; iii. 1—17; iv. 1—8.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—4, 480, 119 (Song VI.)

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

JUBILATE

A Sermon

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, October 25th, 1885, by

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him."—Exodus xv. 1, 2.

This is the first song unto the Lord which is recorded in holy scripture. In Jacob's blessing of his children there are verses which may be regarded as songs; but they are mere fragments, and can scarcely be said to be sung unto the Lord. There are other couplets in the Book of Genesis, but this is the first connected song upon record. I should think that Abraham often sang unto the Lord; but we have no record of it. We can hardly doubt but that Isaac had his quiet psalm, as Enoch had, and Noah, and others who called upon the name of the Lord; but none of these hymns are left to us. This is the very first of those sacred songs preserved in Scripture, and in some respects it is first in in merit as well as in time. At any rate, its august occasion lifts it into the highest place among patriotic hymns.

The song of Moses appears to have been chanted by an exceeding great multitude. Miriam, the prophetess, took her timbrel and led the strain, all the daughters of Israel going forth with her with their timbrels and dances, and the whole multitude of the people taking up the strain. Never had the shores of the Red Sea, or any other sea, heard such a song. There were at least six hundred thousand men, beside women and children. What an assembly! Millions made up that choir! Though their voices were little tuned to music, yet as they lifted them up, each one throwing his whole strength into the strain, it must have sounded like the noise of many waters, especially when they repeated the refrain, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

We saw just now, in our reading in the fifteenth chapter of Revelation, that the Song of Moses, the servant of God and of the Lamb, will be sung toward the close of this dispensation, when those who have gotten the victory over the beast and his image shall stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. Before the seven last plagues shall be poured

out upon the earth, and God shall overthrow the hosts of Antichrist once for all, then shall this song be heard, sung, not by the Israelitish nation, but by that higher Israel who have escaped by the grace of God from the power of the spiritual Pharaoh, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. How sweetly will they together take up the song, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously! Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty."

It is obvious, then, from the plentiful allusions to this song in holy scripture, that it is full of deep spiritual significance. It teaches us not only to praise God concerning the literal overthrow of Egypt, but to praise him concerning the overthrow of all the powers of evil, and the final deliverance of all the chosen. It is God's intent that from the day of Moses downward, even to the hour when flames of fire shall lick up the works of men, and the heavens themselves shall be dissolved with fervent heat, that this shall be the song of the chosen people everywhere, "Sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously."

The first verse of this song was quoted by David. I think you will find it in almost the same words three times in the Psalms, but especially in the hundred and eighteenth Psalm you have the exact words, "The Lord is my strength and song; and is become my salvation." As if the Holy Spirit, when he furnished Isaiah with his noblest minstrelsy, could not excel the earlier strains of Moses, Isaiah himself, in chapter twelve, has the same words: "Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation." It is evident that this patriotic song was interwoven with the life of Israel, and that when good and gracious men would express themselves in praise at their very best, they fell back upon this song of Moses, and they sang unto the Lord who had triumphed gloriously. So full of significance then as this song is, there is something for us to learn from it this morning. May God the Holy Ghost, who dictated this song to Moses, now write it afresh upon his people's hearts! Breathe on us, Holy Spirit, that we also may be filled with the praises of Jehovah.

First, I shall want you to notice *the time for singing this song.* The text begins, "*Then* sang Moses and the children of Israel this song." Secondly, I shall want you to observe *the tone of this song;* it is worthy to be sung in heaven itself. High and lofty indeed it is. And thirdly, we will consider *the first clauses of the song itself:* "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him."

I. It will be instructive to notice THE TIME OF THE SINGING OF THIS SONG. To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: there is a time of the singing of birds, and there is a time for the singing of saints. "*Then* sang Moses."

It was first of all at *the moment of realized salvation.* "The Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore; and Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and his servant Moses. *Then* sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." There was no singing in Egypt; sighing, and crying, and groaning, and lamentation abounded

there, till the Lord said, "I have surely heard the cry of my people." There was no singing that I know of even at the celebration of the paschal supper, on that dreadful night when they ate the lamb in haste with their loins girded, and their staves in their hands. Its first observance was upon a night almost too solemn for song. I do not read that they sang when they came to Succoth, or reached their first encampment; I doubt not that they sang snatches of songs when they found themselves free from their daily tasks, and from the Egyptian rod. No doubt there were individual songs, but the masses did not unite in concerted music: they were too hurried and too much in fear of pursuit. No poet, as yet, had arisen to write a lyric in which all would join. The hour of their complete deliverance had not yet fully come. They marched on steadily, but they had hardly reached the time for timbrels. When they had crossed the sea, and the waters thereof rolled between them and the house of their bondage, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." Their previous lives had been one long-drawn sigh, or one discord of anguish and fear and woe; but when their slavery was altogether a thing of the past, *then* sang Moses. The depths have covered the Egyptian host; there is not one of them left; "*Then* sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord."

You will have noticed, perhaps, in reading the previous chapter, that Moses had said to the people (xiv. 14): "The Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace." But now that God has fought for them, they are not commanded to hold their peace any longer. The battle is fought, and the victory is won, and "*Then* sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." How could they help it? Surely "if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out."

What does that teach us, brothers and sisters, but that we cannot sing in the land of bondage while under the dominion of sin and Satan? How shall we sing the Lord's song in that strange land? We do not even sing in the first moments of our spiritual life, when our question is how to escape destruction through the sprinkling of the blood. Nor do we, perhaps, sing in those first hurried steps when we fly from the power of sin and Satan, endeavouring to escape out of bondage. But, oh, when we see that Christ has saved us, when we understand that he that believeth in him hath everlasting life, then we sing! When we learn that "he that believeth is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses," and hear the Word of the Lord declaring, "To as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," then we sing unto the Lord. Who could stop us? It would be unnatural for us to be silent after sin is put away. When we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son the dumb devil is cast out of us. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." Our early days, when first we saw how complete was the redemption of Christ, were days of constant praise; and I think to-day if we see afresh how perfect is the righteousness of Christ, how fully accepted is the great atonement, how secure is our standing by virtue of our union with the Son of God, we shall return to our music and make this house resound with grateful psalms. When we doubt our salvation

we suspend our singing; but when we realize it, when we get a grip of it, when we see clearly the great work that God has done for us, then we sing unto the Lord who hath for us also triumphed gloriously. I say again, how can we help singing? How can our joy of heart any longer be pent up? It must pour itself forth in floods of harmony, in tunes of realized salvation.

So is it also in *times of distinct consecration.* You may not see this at first, but I would remind you that the apostle assures us that all Israel were "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." When Pharaoh and his hosts had been destroyed, Israel stood for the first time, as a nation separated from Egypt. The Red Sea was a most effectual division; Israel became a distinct people, a race redeemed from among men: they would never again feel the yoke of Mizraim, they would not return unto Egypt, nor would Pharaoh again pursue them. They were now a distinct people consecrated unto Jehovah; to them God would reveal himself, and among them he would dwell. That passage through the Red Sea was the type of their death, their burial, and their resurrection to a new life; it was their national baptism unto God: and therefore they sang as it were a new song. Do you wonder that they did so? It is the happiest thing that can ever happen to a mortal man, to be dedicated to God: it is the grandest posture in which a creature can stand, to be fully consecrated to his Creator: it is the sweetest and happiest condition in which a heart can be, when it feels that it is redeemed of the Lord, and henceforth is not its own, but bought with a price. No song among sweet pastorals can exceed in sweetness that heavenly Canticle, "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine." There is no greater joy than to know that the Lord has chosen us unto himself to be his peculiar heritage. Conscious of redemption by blood and separation unto Jehovah, their God, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord." Oh you that hope that you are Christians, but have never yet taken the distinct step to avow yourselves to be wholly the Lord's; oh you that have never come clean away from Egypt, and made the waters to roll between you and a guilty world—you have delayed a joy which I trust you may not longer miss, lest that dreadful text be fulfilled in you, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." "Then," in the day of realized salvation, "then," in the day of distinct consecration, they sang this song unto the Lord.

Brethren, it was also *a day of the manifest display of God's power.* Our hearts are heavy; at least, mine is so, when God seems to put his right hand into his bosom and not to vindicate his own cause. I am most sad because I see error prevalent everywhere; falsehood reigns, and Jannes and Jambres withstand Moses, and the prince of this world disdainfully demands, "Who is Jehovah?" Plagues many are upon us: the earth swarms with errors as if the dust were turned into lice throughout all the land. Heresies like frogs are croaking everywhere; they have come up into the King's chambers. The Lord hath sent a thick darkness over all the land, even darkness that may be felt. The people loathe to drink of the waters of our sanctuaries; for a curse is

upon them in many a place. Our heart feels bowed down, and we go mourning, and say, "Why hast thou made us to drink the wine of astonishment?" But when we hear of conversions, when we see God blessing the work of the Sabbath-school, when we hear of sinners turning to Christ and seeking mercy, when we notice the children of God diligent in service, when we see the work of the Lord wrought with vigour, then is our heart exceeding glad, and then, like Moses and the children of Israel, we sing unto the Lord. How can we be silent when God's arm is made bare? A revival is our joyous holiday. If we had our choice of all the benedictions that God can give us on earth, it would be to see the church revive, his truth prevail, and his kingdom come. It is not with some of us a matter of indifference whether the truth is preached or error is proclaimed; no, it is our life to see the gospel conquer. Now we live if ye stand fast in the faith; but our spirit distinctly sickens in proportion as the church of God decays; and when the church is strong, and God is with her, then is our heart revived, and our song bursts forth, "The Lord is my strength and my song; he is become my salvation."

But this song may be sung *at* all times throughout the life of faith.

I want to put it to the people of God here whether it is good to save up our songs for special occasions of great joy, or for times when we have something visible to sing about. Should not the believer sing by faith as well as live by faith? Do you not think that the song of Moses and the children of Israel at the Red Sea was, after all, a poor affair as far as faith is concerned? The bulk of the Israelites had very little faith indeed; and loud as was the song, there was more noise than faith in it; for within a day or two they began to murmur against God. Sing in fine weather! Any bird can do that. Praising God when all goes well is common-place work. Everybody marks the nightingale above all other birds because she singeth when the other minstrels of the wood are silent and asleep; and thus doth faith praise God under the cloud. Songs in the day are from man, but God himself giveth songs in the night. O come, let us sing unto the Lord under the clouds; let us pour forth his praises in the fires! Let us praise him under depressions; let us magnify him when our heart is heavy. Faith believes in God when there is nothing to support her but the bare promise. That man was highly commended who did not despair of the Roman Republic; let us never despair of the Redeemer's kingdom. That is the true Christian who can say, when everything grieves him, "Nevertheless, with joy will I draw water out of the wells of salvation; for I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live." "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." I ask to-day from every heavy heart and every downcast spirit, from every man that contendeth earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and trembles for the ark of the Lord, that in the midst of his trembling and grief, he should burst into song. Rob not God of his glory, but let it be said this day, "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Thus we have spoken upon the time for singing. That time is NOW, I think. Let your hearts begin to ring all their bells, and let not their sweet chimes cease for evermore.

II. Notice, secondly, THE TONE OF THIS SONG. "Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord."

Note, first, that the tone is *enthusiastic*. There is not a dull line, there is not a dreary sentence, all through; it is full of force, life, power; it is Luther's Old Hundredth psalm, and more; it rises to a height of intense enthusiasm which cannot be excelled. The words are, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously"; and the singers endeavour to sing gloriously, too.

The tone is also *congregational*, being intended for every Israelite to join in it. Though Moses began by saying, "I will sing unto the Lord," yet Miriam concluded with, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." This is a hymn for every child of God, for all that have come out of Egypt. Should not there be praise from every one of you? You in the back settlements, you that bear the mark of Egypt's lash, and smart from wounds still unhealed; you that remember well the task-master, and the iron furnace; yet sing ye unto the Lord. From Egypt lately come, sing ye unto the Lord! There should be sent up unto God by his church a perfectly unanimous harmony of praise. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness!" Let all the redeemed of the Lord say so. "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation." Let the song be enthusiastic and unanimous.

Yet please to notice how very *distinctly personal* it is. It is strikingly so. "*I* will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously. The Lord is *my* strength and song, and he is become *my* salvation; he is *my* God, and *I* will prepare him an habitation; *my* father's God, and *I* will exalt him." Do not lose yourself in the throng. It is no egotism to resolve that if nobody else will sing, you will say with David, "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live." The fact is, that unanimity cannot become fact if each mind is not active in praise. We cannot have a perfect accord unless each child of God feels that he must make his own distinct music melodious in the ears of the Most High. I tell you, brethren, if *you* will not praise the Lord this day, *I* will. Do you not say the same? Does not each brother and sister here say, "If no others feel bound to gratitude, yet I have such reason for thanksgiving that I will praise the Lord while I have any being"? In my case the Lord hath "triumphed gloriously"; and if others will not take him to be their God, yet this God is my God for ever and ever; he shall be my guide even unto death. I like the personality of this song, and would urge you to follow it. Some of you cannot sing unto God because you have no personal enjoyment of grace from him, and do not know God for yourselves. Oh, if this be your case, do not let yon sun go down until you do know this God, and so can offer your own peculiar song to him.

Note, again, the tone of this song is *exceeding confident*. There is not a shadow of doubt in it: it is all the way through most positive in its ascriptions of praise. The lip does not quiver, the mind does not waver. It begins, "I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed

gloriously." It declares a fact, about which there can be no doubt: "the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea"; and it goes on to make statements which are not qualified with hopes, and desires, and "ifs," and "buts," but are bold assertions which cannot be challenged. "The Lord *is* my strength and my song, and he *is* become my salvation." That is the kind of singing. I do not mind occasionally singing with Cowper, when he is down in the dumps; for some of his dreary hymns admirably express the experience of the weaker members of the family; but I would not always keep to the minor key. Oh no! let us sing songs of joy and victory. Doubts and fears ill become the children of God. The full assurance of understanding is our privilege and our duty, and why should we not have it? When we come before God, why should we bring him such broken-legged worship? No, let us bring him perfect praises, the firstlings of our bullocks, even as David says, "Then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar." God should be worshipped with the best we have; his mercy is so sure, so true, that he ought to have our fullest faith. Where is room for doubt? Let us sing with confidence unto the Lord.

And this song is *exceeding comprehensive.* It sings of what God has done, and then of what God will do in bringing his people into the Promised Land; nor does it finish till it rises to that loftiest strain of all: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever." I think I hear them repeating that verse again and again: "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah." Sing to the Lord, not only of the past, but of the present and the future. Sing of the second coming; sing of the glory to be revealed; sing of high heaven and the city that needs no candle, neither light of the sun; sing of the victories of Christ when the armies of heaven shall ride forth on their white horses, and he shall lead them whose name is written on his vesture and on his thigh—King of kings, and Lord of lords. There is matter enough for eternal music if our hearts are right with God.

Note, too, all through, that this song is *immeasurably joyous.* The Israelites were slaves enjoying new liberty; children let out to play. How merrily did they disport themselves! They did not know how to be glad enough. Let us give to God our unlimited joy. David said, "God is my exceeding joy." I know of no greater word than that word "exceeding"; because, however far you go, if your joy is "exceeding," it is above the highest; and however brave the description, if your joy be "exceeding," it surpasses all language. Believers ought to be unutterably happy. Men redeemed with the precious blood of Christ ought habitually to be almost too happy to live: men that are children of God, and heirs of the covenant, and are soon to be where Jesus is in the ineffable splendour of Jehovah's light, ought to feel their soul overflowing with delight. The pulse of the believer should beat hallelujahs; every heaving of the lungs should raise a *Te Deum.* Oh, if our minds could but rise into the heavenlies, where we ought to be, we should not only be happy as the days are long, but we should enjoy the days of heaven upon the earth!

Yet I must say, however enthusiastic that song was, and however full of joy it was, *it was only such a song as was due unto the Lord.* If those people on that day had sung to the Lord some dull, heavy tune,

I think if I had been there I should have said, "Change that note. Rouse ye to ardour! Awake, awake, put on strength." The new tunes of the present age are constructed upon the principle of "Let us sing and rattle through the words as hard as we can go." I like weightier music; moving swiftly, but yet grandly. Such was the song of Moses, full of solemnity, but full of heart; a tune into which every one could throw the full volume of his voice without fear of spoiling the delicacy of tone. But, brethren, the tribes of Israel did not even then praise the Lord half as he should be praised. If all the angels in heaven had left their seats and descended to the Red Sea shore, and if cherubim and seraphim had joined the lofty song, it had not been more than meet for the occasion. So to-day, if we could arouse all on earth, and all in heaven, as well as all that is within us, to bless and magnify the Lord, the song would not be equal to the majesty of the divine goodness; it would be but a faint expression of what God deserveth from each one of us. Therefore, let us sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously.

> "Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea!
> Jehovah has triumph'd, his people are free.
> Sing—for the pride of the tyrant is broken,
> His chariots, his horsemen, all splendid and brave,
> How vain was their boasting! The Lord hath but spoken,
> And chariots and horsemen are sunk in the wave."

III. We are to dwell for a few minutes upon THE FIRST CLAUSES OF THIS SONG. "The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him."

Notice, the song is all of God; there is not a word about Moses. Read this song through, and neither Moses, nor Aaron, nor Miriam are in it: God is all in all: "I will sing unto Jehovah." That is blessed praise when self lies with the Egyptians at the bottom of the sea, and when everything that is in us that is commendable is traced to the grace of God, and the Lord is magnified for it. Oh for the glorification of Jesus, and none but Jesus! Brothers, we spoil our music by diverting our thoughts to man. Let us forget men, forget earth, forget time, forget self, forget this mortal life, and only think of our God. The song shall be all for thee, O Lord, for thou art all in all; and if we have one note that is determined to go astray we will this day bind it with cords, even with cords to the horns of thine altar, O Jehovah.

Observe, the song dwells upon what God has done: "The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea." There is nothing concerning the deeds of Moses and Aaron, or the pride of Pharaoh, or the craft of Jannes and Jambres. No, the whole is consecrated to the doings of the Lord. Let us trace all the mercies we get to our God, for he hath wrought all our works in us; he hath chosen us, he hath redeemed us, he hath called us, he hath quickened us, he hath preserved us, he hath sanctified us, and he will perfect us in Christ Jesus. The glory is all the Lord's. Let us sing of what the Lord has done. When you read human history, read it to see the finger of God in it; trace all along through human story the silver line of covenant working; observe how

the Lord casts the horse and his rider into the sea when they come out against him or his people.

The song also declares what the Lord will yet do. It is not about what evil men are doing, or what we are afraid will happen through their malice; but of what the Lord alone will do. He says, "Thou wilt surely bring them in"; he pictures the whole affair finished, and Israel settled in the Promised Land, and this is his song. Come, brethren, let us sing the music of the future, the music of what God will do. Do you believe that the Lord will be defeated in the long run? Do you fear that at the end Jehovah's everlasting purpose will fail—that Christ will have died in vain? Think you the eternal truth promulgated in this book will be driven out of the earth by modern thought? or that our old Christianity, for which our fathers bled, will become extinct? By no means. We shall conquer yet in the great name of Jehovah. Therefore let us take heart of hope to ourselves, and sing of what the Lord hath done so often; for again and again, "The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."

Take up the first note: "The Lord is my *strength*." What a noble utterance! Poor Israel had no strength! She had cried out by reason of her sore bondage, making bricks without straw. Poor Israel was weakness itself! but Jehovah drew near in power. The Lord is my strength when I have no strength of my own. By the strength of the Lord, Israel came forth with a high hand and an outstretched arm; Egypt was glad when they departed, and the Egyptians gave them jewels of silver and jewels of gold that they might wish them well in departing; for God had given them honour in the sight of the people. Thus the Lord is our strength when we are at the extremity of weakness.

The Lord was also Israel's strength against strength. Pharaoh was exceeding mighty. The kings of the earth trembled at the neighing of his war-horse; the rattling of his chariots made the very heavens to resound; but God was more than a match for him. When strength comes out against God's people, God meets it with his omnipotence. What is Pharaoh's strength when matched against Jehovah's might? A paper pellet thrown against a wall of brass. The enemy said, "I will pursue; I will overtake; I will divide the spoil," and so on; but Jehovah had only to blow with his wind, and the sea covered them. Thus will the Lord be our strength when the mighty are against us.

It is well to say, "The Lord is my strength" when we are weak and the enemy is strong; but we must mind that we say the same when we are strong, and our enemies are routed. Suppose Israel had stood on the shore and cried, "The Egyptian power is broken by the sons of Jacob. Israel hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon." Suppose the nation had boasted itself, it would have been guilty of a treasonable attempt upon God's glory. Lo! Israel is strong enough to make the dukes of Edom tremble, and the mighty men of Moab to be afraid; but she must not sing unto her own honour. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name." Let this, then, be our song when we are weak, and our song when we are strong: "The Lord is my strength."

Note, the word is not "The Lord gives me strength," but "The Lord *is* my strength"! How strong is a believer? I say it with reverence, he is as strong as God—"The Lord is my strength." God, the infinite Jehovah, in the infinity of his nature, is our strength.

The next is, "The Lord is my *song*," that is to say, the Lord is the giver of our songs; he breathes the music into the hearts of his people; he is the creator of their joy. The Lord is also the subject of their songs: they sing of him and of all that he does on their behalf. The Lord is, moreover, the object of their song: they sing unto the Lord. Their praise is meant for him alone. They do not make melody for human ears, but unto the Lord. "The Lord is my song." Then I ought always to sing; and if I sing my loudest, I can never reach the height of this great argument, nor come to the end of it. This song never changes. If I live by faith my song is always the same, for "the Lord is my song." Our song unto God is God himself. He alone can express our intensest joy. O God, thou art my exceeding joy. Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, thou art my hymn of everlasting delight.

"The Lord is my strength and song, and *he is become my salvation*." The Father in his eternal purpose is my salvation; the Son in his complete redemption is my salvation; nay, not in his redemption only, but in his life, his death, his resurrection, his intercession, his second coming, he has become my salvation. And the Holy Ghost indwelling in me, quickening me, instructing me, illuminating me, perfecting me, keeping me—he is become my salvation. Triune God, it is not alone that thou dost save me, but thou art my salvation. I look for nothing but what is in thee, and if thou givest thyself to me, thou hast given me a perfect salvation, salvation from bondage, salvation from worldliness, salvation from death and hell, salvation into light, and liberty, and love, and joy, salvation that shall culminate in eternal glory. A full salvation is God to his people.

Next "He is *my God*." Perhaps this is the most joyous note of all. "He is become my salvation"—this is very sweet: "He is my God"—this is the sweetest of all. "He is my God," I choose him to be my God, but I choose him of necessity; I can do no other. Who else can be my God? In the Revised Version it is, "This is my God," and a very proper translation, too; as if Israel saw what God did at the Red Sea, and then exclaimed, "This is my God." This God of justice, this God of vengeance and power, is my God. Beloved, choose Jehovah to be your God: whom else can you choose? Let your hearts cling to him.

But then comes the added word, "*He is my Father's God*," that is to say, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; a God by covenant, the God who has given himself to us by his own purpose and promise, and therefore is our God, not by any right of merit on our behalf, but solely by the gift of his free, rich, covenant grace. Let us praise the triune God of free grace, for he belongs to each one of us. There is nothing in God that is not mine; there is no high and lofty attribute that is not mine; there is no deep and dark decree that is not mine. Thou hast neither cross nor crown, O Jesus, which is not mine. He hath given himself over to us to be our God for ever and ever. Come, let us exult in his name. Have you lost your goods? You have not lost

your God. Have you nothing on earth? Yet can you say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." This is a holy portion, a happy portion, a heavenly portion, a sure portion, an endless portion, a portion which makes us feel rich to all the intents of bliss. This God is our God for ever and ever. Let us praise and bless his name.

Note, once more, that as Moses said, "He is my strength, my song, my salvation, my God," now he adds, "*He is my praise.*" The text in the Old Version is, "I will prepare him an habitation." This jars a little on my ear; it rather sinks the majesty of the infinite for Israel to think so soon of Jehovah as One for whom she could prepare a habitation. Building a habitation was rather the idea of David in his hour of decline, than of Israel in the day of her astonishment and victory. The Revised Version of the Old Testament, which is infinitely superior to the Revised Version of the New Testament, renders it: "This is my God: I will praise him." The fact is, there are two words so nearly alike that it is hard to tell which is correct—"habitation" or "praise." Some of the oldest versions of all have it, "He is my praise." I never like meddling with the Old Version, however; so we will take them both, and make sure that we do not miss the meaning. Doth not the Lord inhabit the praises of Israel? We will prepare him a habitation of praise. As soon as Israel had got clear of the Red Sea, clear of Egypt, clear of Pharaoh, by the power of Jehovah, then she said, "I will praise him." O God, it shall be the business of thy people henceforth to praise thee! We have no bricks to make, but we will praise thee; we have no whips to fear, but we will praise thee freely; we are not slaves now, but we are bound to thee for ever, and we will praise thee. Then the people seem to say, "We will praise the Lord by regular and abiding worship." Inasmuch as in order to worship, a place is needed, the thought comes up, "We will prepare him an habitation." We will habitually praise our God for this great deliverance. Let us build our God a house of praises; let us lay the deep foundations in love, set up the pillars with gratitude, and roof in the whole with joyous hallelujahs.

The thought of care comes before me in the Authorized Version: "I will prepare him an habitation," as if Israel said, "I will take pains to praise God, I will do it intelligently, and with my best powers; he shall have the best I can give to him. My best is poor compared with his deserts, but the preparation of my heart shall be his; I will lay myself out that everything shall be done decently and in order for the praise of this most High God; I will prepare him an habitation of praise. Does it not look as if Israel said, "The Lord hath come hither to this Red Sea to fight my enemies, and I pray that he may abide with me. I will prepare an habitation that he may remain. Lord, be not as a wayfaring man that tarrieth but for a night: let thy presence be ever with me, and I will praise thee always." To have abiding fellowship with God is the natural desire of every redeemed soul. O brothers, let us import our own desires into Israel's words. Let us say,

> "Come, dearest Lord, descend and dwell
> By faith and love in every breast;
> Then shall we know, and taste, and feel
> The joys that cannot be express'd."

Never leave us, nor even hide thy face from us, O Lord, our God. Dwell in us, that we may dwell in thee. Reside in these bodies, and make them thy temples. Abide with us. Manifest thyself to us as thou dost not to the world.

The verse closes with, "He is my father's God, *and I will exalt him.*" How can we exalt him who is already high above all thought? We cannot make God really greater, but we can make him greater in the estimation of our fellow-men. Let it be the business of our lives to magnify him. Let us tell to our friends that which will make the Lord appear more glorious in their estimation. Let us lay ourselves out, by pen, and tongue, and life, to make our Lord Jesus Christ more honourable among those who surround us. Say, "I must and will exalt him. Perhaps I have groaned too much over my trials; perhaps I have been too depressed and heavy in spirit; but from this day I will exalt my Lord, and sound forth his praises. If he will permit me, I will make the glory of the Lord the one object of my being." Come, ye young men and maidens, ye old men and fathers, let us praise the Lord on the high-sounding cymbals, and spend the rest of our days in crying, "Sing ye unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously." Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Exodus xv. 1—21; Revelation xv.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—175, 46 (Part II.), 136 (Part II.)

"THE SWORD AND THE TROWEL." Edited by C. H. SPURGEON.

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DEATH AND LIFE: THE WAGE AND THE GIFT.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 1ST, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."—Romans vi. 23.

IN the fifth chapter of this Epistle, Paul had shown at considerable length our justification from sin through the righteousness of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Our apostle goes on to speak of our sanctification in Christ; that as by the righteousness of Christ we have been delivered from the guilt and penalty of sin, so by the power and life of Christ in us we are delivered from the dominion of sin, so as not to live any longer therein. His object is to show that true servants of God cannot live in sin; that by reason of our newness of life in Christ, it is not possible that we should continue to yield our members instruments unto iniquity. We have passed out of the realm of death, we have come into the domain of life; and, therefore, we must act according to that life; and that life being in its essence pure, holy and heavenly, we must proceed from righteousness unto holiness.

Whilst he is driving at this argument, our apostle incidentally lets fall the text which may be regarded as a Christian proverb, a golden sentence, a divine statement of truth worthy to be written across the sky. As Jesus said of the woman who anointed him to his burial, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached, in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her"; so I may say, "Wheresoever the gospel is preached, there shall this golden sentence, which the apostle has let fall, be repeated as a proof of his clearness in the faith." Here you have both the essence of the gospel, and a statement of that misery from which the gospel delivers all who believe. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

First, it will be my painful duty to dwell for a while upon *death as the wages of sin;* and then, more joyfully, we shall close our morning's meditation by considering *eternal life as the gift of God.*

I. First, DEATH IS THE WAGES OF SIN. The apostle has in his mind's eye the figure of a soldier receiving his pay. Sin, the captain, pays his hired soldiers a dreadful wage. The original word signifies

"rations," or some translate it "stipend." It means the payment which soldiers receive, put in the plural as wages, because pay can be given in different forms: soldiers might be paid in meat, or in meal, or in money, or in part by their clothing, or by lands promised when the time of service came to an end. Now that which sin, the grim captain, pays to those who are under him, is comprehended in this terrible term "death." It is a word as full as it is short. A legion of terrors are found around this "king of terrors." Death is the rations which sin pays to those who enlist beneath its banner.

Now "sin is any want of conformity to, or transgression of the law of God." Sin is that evil power which is in the world in rebellion against the good and gracious power of righteousness which sits upon the throne of God. This evil power of unholiness, untruth, sin, contrariety to the mind of God, holds the great mass of our fellow-men beneath its sway at this hour. The rations with which it rewards the most desperate valour of its champions is death.

To set forth this terrible fact, I shall make a few observations. First, *death is the natural result of all sin.* When man acts according to God's order he lives; but when he breaks his Maker's laws he wrecks himself, and does that which causes death. The Lord warned Adam thus: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Dying does not mean ceasing to exist, for Adam did not cease to exist, nor do those who die. The term "death" conveys to me no such idea as that of ceasing to exist, or how could I understand that word in 1 John iii. 14: "He that loveth not his brother abideth in death"? How could a man abide in annihilation? A grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies; but it does not cease to be; nay, rather, it bringeth forth much fruit. That Adam did die in the day when he ate of that fruit is certain, or else the Lord spake not the truth. His nature was wrecked and ruined by separation from God, and by a fall from that condition which constitutes the true life of man. When any man commits sin, he dies to holiness and purity. No transgression is venial, but every sin is mortal, and gendereth death.

The further a man goes in lust and iniquity, the more dead he becomes to purity and holiness: he loses the power to appreciate the beauties of virtue, or to be disgusted with the abominations of vice. Our nature at the very outset has lost that delicacy of perception which comes of healthy life; and as men proceed in unchastity, or injustice, or unbelief, or sin of any kind, they enter deeper and deeper into that awful moral death which is the sure wage of sin. You can sin yourself into an utter deadness of conscience, and that is the first wage of your service of sin.

All desire after God, and all delight in him, die out where sin reigns. Death is the separation of the soul from God. Alas, this death hath passed upon all men. Can two walk together except they be agreed? Man may continue to believe in the existence of God, but for all practical purposes God to him is really non-existent. The fool hath said in his heart, "No God"—he does not desire God; indeed, he wishes there were no God. As for seeking after God, and delighting himself in the Almighty, the sinner knows nothing thereof; his sin has killed him towards all desire for God, or love to him, or delight in

him. He is to God dead while he liveth. "To be carnally minded is death."

As there is through sin a death to God, so is there a death to all spiritual things. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The man doth not perceive and discern spiritual things, for he is dead to them. Talk to him of the sorrows of the spiritual life, he has never felt them, and he despises them as mean cant. Speak to him of the joys of the spiritual life, and you will soon discover that you are casting your pearls before swine: he has never sought such joys, he does not believe in them, and he thinks you a fanatic for talking such nonsense. He is as dead to spiritual realities as a mole is blind to astronomy, or a stone is dead to music. To him it is as though there were neither angel, nor spirit, nor God, nor mercy-seat, nor Christ, nor holiness, nor heaven, nor hell. Giving himself up to the dominion of sin, the sinner receives more and more the result of his sin; even as the apostle says, "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." "He that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

Inasmuch as in holy and spiritual things dwells the highest happiness of our manhood, this man becomes an unhappy being; at first by deprivation of the joy which spiritual life brings with it, and afterwards by suffering the inevitable misery of spiritual death. God has justly appointed that if a man will not be conformed to God he shall not taste of happiness; and if a man will follow after that which is evil, that evil shall of necessity bring with it sorrow and unrest: Romans ii. 9. Since sin as naturally brings spiritual death upon men as fire brings burning, death is spoken of as the wages of sin.

I would observe next, that *the killing power of some sins is manifest to all observers;* for it operates upon the body and the mind as well as upon the spirit. This spiritual death of which I speak may not strike some of you with fear: you may think it a small matter, though to me I do confess that hell, however painted, is never so terrible a thing as the death which fills it. Some sins are murderous to a degree which is clear to all. For instance, if a man takes to drunkenness, or if he indulges in lasciviousness, it is manifest even to the unspiritual that the wages of sin is death. See how by many diseases and deliriums the drunkard destroys himself: he has only to drink hard enough, and his grave will be digged. The horrors which attend upon the filthy lusts of the flesh I will not dare to mention; but many a body rotting above ground shall be my silent witness. All know, or ought to know, the mischief which is occasioned to men and women by the violation of that law which commands us to be pure. I spoke the other day to an aged brother who feels the result of natural decay, but is in all other respects sound and healthy, and I congratulated him upon retaining so much vigour at such an age. "Yes," he replied, "I owe it to the grace of God that I never abused myself in my younger days, and hence I have a store of strength in my old age." How many, on the contrary, feel the sins of their youth in their bone, and in their flesh. We have all known that sins of the flesh kill the flesh; and therefore we may infer that sins of the mind kill the mind. Death

in any part of our manhood breeds death to the whole. Death drags man down from the power, beauty, and joy of life to the wretched existence, the feebleness, the abominableness of death. The man is no more a man, but the wreck of a man; and his body is not the house of his soul, but a ruin, in which his poor spirit seeks in vain for comfort. A withered heart, a blinded mind, a blasted being; such is the death which comes of sin. The wage of sin is openly death when it assumes certain forms, and it is always really so, take what form it may.

Now *this tendency is in every case the same*, "the wages of sin is death" everywhere to everyone. It is so not only where you can see it operating upon the body, but where you cannot see it. I may perhaps startle you when I say that the wages of sin is death even in the man who has eternal life. Sin has the same deadly character to one as to the other, only an antidote is found. You, my Christian brother, cannot fall into sin without its being poison to you, as well as to anybody else; in fact, to you it is more evidently poison than to those hardened to it. If you sin it destroys your joy, your power in prayer, your confidence towards God. If you have spent evenings in frivolity with worldlings, you have felt the deadening influence of their society. What about your prayers at night? You cannot draw nigh unto God. The operation of sin upon your spirit is most injurious to your communion with God. You are like a man who has taken a noxious drug, whose fumes are stupefying the brain, and sending the heart into slumber. If you, being a child of God, fall into any of the sins which so easily beset you, I am sure you will never find that those sins quicken your grace or increase your faith; but on the contrary, they will work you evil, only evil, and that continually. Sin is deadly to any man and every man, whoever he may be; and were it not for the mighty curative operation which the indwelling Spirit of God is always carrying on upon the believer's nature, not one of us would survive the deadly effects of even those sins of infirmity and ignorance into which we fall. I wonder not that Paul cried aloud, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" If a man takes poison, if it does not absolutely kill him, it injures him, and thus proves its killing tendency. In certain places the air is pestilential, and though a very healthy man may pass through them and seem none the worse, yet this does not disprove the general deadly tendency of the malarious district, nor does it even prove that the healthy person is not secretly but really injured by having been there. Evils caused by sin may be too deep to be at once visible, just as the most serious of diseases have their periods of incubation, during which the person affected has no idea of the ill which is hatching within him. Sin is in itself an unmitigated evil, a root which beareth wormwood. Sin is death. Wonder not therefore that the apostle saith, "the wages of sin is death." As the sparks fly upward, and as the rain falleth to the ground, so sin leads to death. As the river takes its leap in the thundering cataract, so must the stream of sin create the fall of death.

Moreover, when we read of anything being a wage, what does it mean? It means that it is a reward for labour. *Death is sin's due reward, and it must be paid.* A master employs a man, and it is due to that man

that he should receive his wages. If his master did not pay him his wages, it would be an act of gross injustice. Now, if sin did not bring upon man death and misery, it would be an injustice. It is necessary for the very standing of the universe that sin should be punished. It must be so. They that sow must reap. The sin which hires you must pay you. Wrong cannot produce right. Iniquity, transgression and sin must, in the nature of things, become darkness, sorrow, misery, death. Every transgression and disobedience must receive its just recompense of reward. There is no use in attempting to alter it so long as God and justice reign: those who do sin's work must receive sin's wage, and "the wages of sin is death."

Now, observe, that this death, *this wage of sin, is in part received by men now as soldiers receive their rations, day by day.* It is a terrible thing that they do so receive it. The Scripture saith, "If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die"—such a life is a continued dying. Again, it is written, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." The wrath of God abideth on him that believeth not on the Son of God; it is there already. I would that men here who are not converted would recollect where they now are—they are "dead in trespasses and sins." O men, you are not merely sick, but you are "dead in your sins"! You are already dead to the highest spiritual enjoyments, and can never know them except by passing from death unto life. You cannot rejoice in God, you cannot know spiritual truth, you cannot taste of spiritual bliss, for your sin deadens you to these things every day that you live in it. To all that which is worthy of a man, to all that which is the true life of manhood, you are dead through sin.

But then a Roman soldier did not enlist merely for his rations; his chief pay often lay in the share of the booty which he received at the end of the war. He expected to share in his captain's triumph, and to be a partaker in the spoil. *Death is the ultimate wage of sin.* The death which is here intended is the eternal loss and wreckage of the soul, the destruction of all about it that is worth having, the drifting of the guilty being for ever upon the full tide of those evil tendencies which caused his sin, and were further increased by sin. When all comes to all, this is where sin will drive you: it will perpetuate itself, and so for ever kill the soul to God, and goodness, and joy and hope. You will enter upon a world in which the highest enjoyments which even God himself can provide for men will be revealed, but they will be hidden from your eyes because you will be utterly incapable of knowing, appreciating, and enjoying them. Being under the ever-growing power of sin, it will become more and more a hopeless thing that you should escape from the death which thus settles down upon you. All the agencies which could have recovered you from the clutch of death have failed to bless you in the life which has come to an end; and now in eternity neither the death of Christ, nor the Holy Ghost, nor the ministry of the word, will ever again operate upon you. Till your last moments you chose sin, and through eternity you will still choose it; for this death is the reward of your sin. Our Lord himself said, "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." Then you shall come to know to the full what that awful word "death" really means as God intends it. Meanwhile, if you would

escape this dreadful doom, read your Bible and see how the result of sin is expounded. As our Saviour taught, that future death includes within itself the fire which never shall be quenched, the worm that never dieth, the outer darkness, the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, and the departure into everlasting fire which begins with a curse from the lip of love. Alienation from God is death, and can never be otherwise. The Holy Ghost, speaking of the ungodly, saith, "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power." This will be the ultimatum of sin. As surely as rivers run into the sea, so surely must sin run into death; there is no help for it. This hard and impenitent heart heaps up for itself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Sin inevitably pays to all who are its servants the death by which bondage to its power is sealed for ever. O my God, grant us grace to see what a wretched service this is which pays such terrible rations now, and gives such a terrible dividing of the spoil in the end.

I shall not longer dwell upon it, the subject is so distressing to me; save that I must add a few solemn words. *The misery of the misery of sin is that it is earned.* Every pang that shall fall upon the ungodly either in this life or in the life to come will have this for its sting,—that it was duly earned. The sinner may well say, "I worked for this; I laid myself out to earn this; I now feel the misery of what I wilfully did." Death is the result of being out of gear with God. But the sinner puts himself into that condition. If men in the world to come could say, "This misery of ours has come upon us by an arbitrary arrangement on the part of God, quite apart from its just results," then they would derive from that fact some kind of comfort to their conscience, some easement of their biting remorse. But when they will be obliged to own that all their woe was their own choice in choosing sin, and is still their own choice in abiding in sin, this will scourge them indeed. Their sin is their hell. The worm which gnaws at the heart of the lost soul is its own wilful hate of God, and love of evil. O lover of sin, you are under the power of this death—this worse than death! You are dead to God, and dead to holiness, and dead to love, and dead to true happiness; and you have brought this death upon yourself, every part and particle of it. You have chosen that which has made you a wreck and a ruin, and that in the teeth of many warnings and admonitions. It must be so, that "the wages of sin is death," and the terror of that death is that it comes as a wage. Why will you die? Why will you earn death? Why will you choose your own delusions? Have you wickedly determined to prove what outer darkness means? Have you turned your back on God just to see how a man must fare who wars with his Maker? Have not enough dashed themselves to pieces on the rock of sin? Why will you do the same? If you will do so, this shall be the misery of your misery: that you brought it on yourselves, and that you rejected the one remedy provided of the Lord in the person of his Son Jesus Christ.

Note, next—and I speak with the truest compassion—that *it will be the*

folly of follies to go on working for such a wage. Hitherto they that have worked for sin have found no profit in it. What fruit have you had, any of you, in the things whereof you have cause to be ashamed? Has sin ever brought you any real benefit? Come, now, and let us reason together:—up till now has doing wrong ever worked for your health, or your happiness? Are you the better for hate, or greed, or lust, or drink? Has sin ever developed your inner self into anything worth calling life? You know it has not. It has rather destroyed you than improved you, and you know it. Why, then, will you go further in sin? Have you not learned enough already of the deadly nature of evil? Why will you press further into this barren region, which will become more and more a howling wilderness to you as you advance into it? Why will you go where it will be more and more difficult to return? Oh, may God's infinite mercy prevent our being such madmen as to labour in the very fire to earn nothing else but death! God forbid that we should plunge from sin to sin by an inventiveness of rebellion, only to discover more and more what it is to be dead for ever to God, and heaven, and hope, and everything that is to be desired.

Let me add, *it ought to be the grief of griefs to each of us that we have sinned.* Oh, misery, to have wrought so long in a service which brings such terrible wages! Though I have known the Lord now these six-and-thirty years, I still regret most deeply every sin that I have ever committed against the perfect law of the Lord. I take it that repentance is not the temporary act of a certain period of time, but it is the spirit of the whole life after conversion. When we know we are forgiven, we repent all the more that ever we loved that sin which is so abominable unto God, and so evil in every way. Evil seems most evil when we have the clearest sense of divine goodness. Its constant wage is death, and only death; and our lamentation is that we harboured this assassin, yea, even became its slave. Let us humble ourselves before God, because we have played the fool exceedingly by sinning against him; we have wounded, injured, and destroyed ourselves, and all for nothing—our only wage being a still deeper destruction.

Oh you that have never repented, but are still abiding in this spiritual death, how I long that the voice of Jesus may echo in that sepulchre of sin in which you now lie asleep: may it arouse you, and make you dread the death that never dies! Oh that you may turn over, as it were, in your grave, and begin to moan, "O God, deliver me!" If there be such a thought as that in your soul, I shall hope that the Spirit of God has begun to bring life into your spirit. But what an awful thing it is to have spent all these days—and some of you are getting grey—in only doing that which is your undoing, in giving life to that which is your death! The sole wage that some of you have yet earned is death. Is not this a poor reward for all the risk, labour, and perseverance with which you have served sin? God help you to see your folly, and repent of it.

One thought more ere I leave this point, and that is, *it must certainly be a miracle of miracles if any sinner here does not remain for ever beneath the power of sin.* Sin has this mischief about it, that it strikes a man with spiritual paralysis; and how can such a palsied one ward off a further blow? It makes the man dead; and to what purpose do we

appeal to him that is dead? I have tried to describe what a dreadful thing it is to be dead to God, and purity, and happiness; but the dead man does not know or care for these things. Our preaching may well be called foolishness, since it is addressed to ears that cannot, or, rather, will not, hear. What a miracle of miracles it is when the Divine life comes streaming down into the heart that sin has chilled into death! What a blessedness it is when God interposes and finds a way by which the wage most justly due shall not be paid! It is a necessity, that every transgression should have its recompense; but in the person of the Lord Jesus such an expiation is made, that sin pays its wage of death to him who did not earn it, while those who did earn it go free. O sinner, none can save you but the God who made you! You, as dead in sin, are in such a state that you will rot into corruption, and go on for ever rotting into a yet fouler and filthier corruption throughout the ages; and none can prevent it but Almighty God himself. Only one power is capable of affording you the help you need; and that power worketh through the Lord Jesus, who is at this moment mighty to save. Oh! that the miracle of miracles might be wrought upon you: for if not, there it stands, "The wages of sin is death." Alas! I fear that sin will pervert even the ministry of the word, and make it a savour of death unto death. This is the first teaching of the text, and I pray the Holy Ghost to impress it on every conscience!

II. And now I am glad to pass into liberty and joy while I speak on the second subject: ETERNAL LIFE IS THE GIFT OF GOD.

Note well the change: death is a *wage*, but life is a *gift*. Sin brings its natural consequences with it; but eternal life is not the purchase of human merit, but the free gift of the love of God. The abounding goodness of the Most High alone grants life to those who are dead by sin. It is with clear intent to teach us the doctrine of the grace of God that the apostle altered the word here from wages to gift. Naturally he would have said, "The wages of sin is death, but the wages of righteousness is eternal life." But he wished to show us that life comes upon quite a different principle from that upon which death comes. In salvation all is of free gift: in damnation everything is of justice and desert. When a man is lost, he has earned it; when a man is saved, it is given him.

Let us notice, first, that *eternal life is imparted by grace through faith.* When it first enters the soul it comes as God's free gift. The dead cannot earn life; the very supposition is absurd. Eternal life enjoyed on earth comes to us as a gift. "What!" saith one, "do you mean to say that eternal life comes into the soul here?" I say yes, here, or else never. Eternal life must be our possession now; for if we die without it it will never be our possession in the world to come, which is not the state of probation, but of fixed and settled reward. When the flame of eternal life first drops into a man's heart, it is not as the result of any good works of his which preceded it, for there were none; nor as the result of any feelings of his, for good feelings were not there till the life came. Both good works and good feelings are the fruit of the heavenly life which enters the heart, and makes us conscious of its entrance by working in us repentance and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "Eternal

life is the gift of God in Jesus Christ." By faith we come consciously into Christ. We trust him, we rest upon him, we become one with him, and thus eternal life manifests itself. Has he not said, "I give unto my sheep eternal life"; and again, "He that believeth in him hath everlasting life"? O beloved, you that have been quickened by the Spirit of God, I am sure you trace that first quickening to the grace of God. Whatever your doctrinal views may be, you are all agreed in the experimental acknowledgment that by the grace of God you are what you are. How could you, being dead, give yourself life? How could you, being the slave of sin, set yourself free? But the Lord in mercy visited you as surely as the Lord Jesus Christ visited the tomb of Lazarus; and he spoke with his almighty voice, and bade you come to life, and you arose and came to life at his bidding. You remember well the change that came upon you. If any man here could have been literally dead, and then could have been made to live, what a wonderful experience his would have been! We should go a long way to hear the story of a man who had been dead, and then was made alive again. But I tell you, his experience, if he could tell it, would not be any more wonderful than our experience as quickened from death in sin; for we have suffered the pains that come through the entrance of life into the soul, and we know the joys which afterwards come of it. We have seen the light that life brings to the spiritual eye; we have felt the emotions that life brings to the quickened heart; we have known the joys which life, and only life, can bring to the entire man. We can tell you something about these things; but if you want to know them to the full, you must feel them for yourselves. "Ye must be born again." We bear our witness that eternal life within our spirit is not of our earning, but the gift of God.

Beloved, since we received eternal life, we have gone on to grow, and we have made great advances in the divine life; our little trembling faith has now grown to be full assurance; that zeal of ours which burned so low that we hardly dared to attempt anything for Jesus has now flamed up into full consecration, so that we live to his praise. Whence has this growth come? Is it not still a free gift? Have you received an increase of life by the law, or has it come to you as the free gift of God? I know what you will say; and if any of you have so grown in grace that you have become ripe Christians; if any of you have been taught of God so that you can teach others; if any of you have been led by the Holy Spirit so that your sanctification is known unto all men, and you have become saintly men and women; I am sure that your holiness and maturity are still gifts received, and not wages earned. I will put the question to you again: Did this abundant life come to you by the works of the law, or by grace through faith which is in Christ Jesus? Your instantaneous answer is, "It is all of grace, in the latter as well as in the earlier stages." Yes, in every degree the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus.

Yes; and when we get to heaven, and the eternal life shall there be developed as a bud opens into a full-blown rose; when our life shall embrace God's life, and God's life shall encompass ours; when we shall be abundantly alive to everything that is holy, divine, heavenly, blessed, and eternally glorious; oh, then we shall confess that our life was all of the grace of God, the free gift of God in Jesus Christ our Lord! I

am sure that our heavenly education will only make us know more and more fully that while death is the well-earned wages of sin, eternal life is from beginning to end the gift of infinite grace.

Beloved, observe gratefully what a wonderful gift this is,—"*the gift of God*,"—the gift which Jesus bestows upon every believer; for "to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on his name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." How express is our Lord's statement: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"! What a life this is! It must be of a wonderful sort, because it is called "life" *par excellence*, emphatically "life," true life, real life, essential life. This does not mean mere existence, as some vainly talk. There never was a greater blunder than to confound life with existence, or death with non-existence; these are two totally different and distinct ideas. The life of man means the existence of man as he ought to exist—in union with God, and consequently in holiness, purity, health, and happiness. Man, as God intended him to be, is man enjoying life; man, as sin makes him, is man abiding in death. All that man can receive of joy and honour the Lord gives to man to constitute life eternal in the world to come. What a life is this! The life that is imparted to us in regeneration is God's own life, brought into us by "the living and incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever." We are akin to God by the new birth, and by loving union with his Son Jesus Christ. What must life mean in God's sense of it?

Moreover, we have life *eternal*, too, never ending. Whatever else may end, this never can. It can neither be killed by temptation, nor destroyed by trial, nor quenched by death, nor worn out by the ages. The gift of the eternal God is eternal life. Those who talk about a man having everlasting life, and losing it, do not know the force of language. If a man has eternal life, it is eternal, and cannot therefore end or be lost. If it be everlasting, it is "everlasting"; to lose it would prove that it was not everlasting. No, if you have eternal life, you can never perish; if God has bestowed it upon you, it will not be recalled, "for the gifts and calling of God are without repentance." This eternal life is evidently a free gift; for how could any man obtain it in any other way? It is too precious to be bought, too divine to be made by man. If it had to be earned, how could you have earned it? You, I mean, who have already earned death. The wage due to you already was death, and by that wage you were effectually shut out from all possibility of ever earning life. Indeed, the earning of life seems to me to be from the beginning out of the question. It has come to us as a free gift; it could not come in any other way.

Furthermore, remember that it is life *in Jesus;* the "through" of our version is "in" in the original. We are in everlasting union with the blessed Person of the Son of God, and therefore we live. To be in Christ is a mystery of bliss. The apostle felt that this was an occasion for again rehearsing our blessed Master's names and titles of honour—"in Jesus Christ our Lord." I noted to you on a former occasion how, at certain seasons, the various honours and titles of great men are

proclaimed by heralds with becoming state; and so here, to the praise of the Lord Jesus, Paul writes his full degree—"Eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord." He writes at large the august name before which every knee shall bow, and he links our life therewith. Here we read the cheering and precious name of Jesus. By that name he is nearest to man; when he was born into our nature he was named Jesus, "for he shall save his people from their sins." The life which comes in connection with him is salvation from sin. In this Saviour is life. The next name is "Christ," or anointed, by which name he is nearest to God, being sent forth and anointed of God to treat with us on God's behalf. He is the Lord's Christ, and our Jesus. Next he is called "Our Lord." Herein lieth the glory of our anointed Saviour: we through grace becoming servants participate in the life and glory of our Lord. He reigneth as our Lord, and by his reigning power he shows himself to be the Lord and giver of life. "All live unto him." Our Lord hath life in himself, and breathes it into us. What a life this is,—a life saved from sin, a life anointed of the Holy Ghost, a life in union with him who is Lord of all. This is the life which is peculiarly the gift of God.

Thus I have set forth this doctrine, and I desire to apply it by adding a little more of practical importance. First, *let us come at this time, one and all, and receive this divine life as a gift in Christ Jesus.* If any of you have been working for it by going about to establish your own righteousness, I beseech you to end the foolish labour by submitting yourselves to the righteousness of God. If you have been trying to feel so much, or to pray so much, or to mourn so much, forbear from thus offering a price, and come and receive life as a free gift from your God. Pull down the idol of your pride, and humbly sue for pardoning grace on the plea of mercy. Believe and live. You are not called upon to earn life, but to receive it; receive it as freely as your lungs take in the air you breathe. If you are dead in sin at this moment, yet the gospel of life has come nigh unto you. With that gospel there comes the life-giving wind of the eternal Spirit. He can call you out of your ruin, and wreckage, and death, and make you live. This is his word, "Awake, thou that sleepest, and rise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee life." Will you have it as a gift? If there be any true life in you your answer will be quick and hearty. You will be lost if you do not receive this gift. Your earnings will be paid into your bosom, and dread will be the death which will settle down upon you. The acceptance of a free gift would not be difficult if we were not proud. Accept it—God help you to accept it at once! Even that acceptance will be God's gift; for the will to live is life; and all true life, from beginning to end, is entirely of the Lord.

Beloved, have we accepted that free gift of eternal life? *Let us abide in it.* Let us never be tempted to try the law of merit; let us never attempt to live by our earnings. No doubt eternal life is a reward in one sense, but it is always a reward of grace, not a reward of debt. The Lord shall give us a crown of life at last as a reward; but even then we shall confess that he first gave us the work by which the crown was won. The Lord first gives us good works, and then rewards us for them. The labour of love is in itself a gift of love.

Grace reigns all along; not only in removing sin, but in working virtue.

Finally, are we now abiding in eternal life, trusting in the Son of God, and clinging to his skirts? then *let us live to his glory.* Do we know that because he lives, we shall live also? If so, let us show by our gratitude how greatly we prize this gift. We dwell in a world where death is everywhere manifesting itself in various forms of corruption; therefore let us see from what the Lord has delivered us. Let no man boast in his heart that he is not subject to the vile influences which hold the world in its corruption. Let no pride because of our new life ever cross our spirit. Chase every such thought as that away with detestation. If our life be of grace, there is no room for boasting, but much space for soul-humbling. When you walk the streets, and hear the groans of the dead in the form of oaths and blasphemies, thank the Lord that you have been taught a more living language. Think of drunkenness and lust as the worms that are bred of the putridity of the death which comes of sin. You are disgusted and horrified, my brethren; but these things would have been in you also but for the grace of God. We are like living men shut up in a charnel-house; wherever we turn we see the dreary works of death; but all this should make us grateful to the sacred power which has brought us out of death into spiritual life.

As for others, let us anxiously ask the question—"Can these dry bones live?" Then let us be obedient to the heavenly vision when the divine word saith to us, "Son of man, prophesy upon these bones." We must cherish the faith which will enable us to do this. Moreover, a sight of the universal death of unrenewed nature should drive us to prayer, so that we cry, "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." This prayer being offered, we should live in hopeful expectancy that the Lord will open the graves of his people, and cause them to come forth and live by his Spirit. Oh for grace to prophesy believingly upon these bones, and say, "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones, Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live." Beloved, we shall yet see them stand up an exceeding great army, quickened of the Lord our God. He delights to burst the bonds of death. Resurrection is one of his chief glories. He heralds resurrection work with trumpets, and angels, and a glorious high throne, because he delighteth in it. The living Jehovah rejoices to give life, and especially to give it to the dead. Corruption flies before him, grave clothes are rent, and sepulchres are broken open. "I am the resurrection, and the life," saith Jesus; and so he is even at this hour. O God, save this congregation to the praise of the glory of thy grace, wherein thou hast made us to live, and to be accepted in thy well-beloved Son. Amen and Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Romans vi.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—100 (Ver. I.), 238, 474

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

HAGAR AT THE FOUNTAIN.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 8TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi."—Genesis xvi. 13, 14.

YOU know the story of Hagar. I am not going to deal with the allegorical meaning of it: that would be apart from our subject this morning. I shall speak of the incident simply as it stands, and even then I shall not use it strictly as a case of sure conversion, for I am not certain that it was such. I suppose Hagar to have been an Egyptian woman, probably one of the maid-servants who were given by the King of Egypt to Abram at that unhappy time when Abram's faith failed him, and he went down into Egypt, and requested Sarai to conceal the fact that she was his wife. Sin, whenever it is committed by the child of God, is sure to involve him in sorrow. In the long run, the result of any false dealing comes home to the believer; and it does so in very unexpected ways. Hagar became the special maid of Sarai. God had promised to Abram that he should have a son, and that thus he should be the father of nations: that blessing did not appear likely to come to him, for there were no children born to Sarai, nor did there seem to be the possibility of any. Husband and wife were both old and well stricken in years. No special mention had been made of Sarai in the promise as it then stood; and therefore it was not clear to Abram but what some other might be the mother of the expected seed; and when, in her unbelief, Sarai proposed that her maid should become his secondary wife, Abram hearkened to her. According to the custom of the times, and of oriental nations, this act was right enough; but as it was not really right in itself, and showed littleness of faith on Abram's part, sorrow soon came of it. Hagar began to behave herself proudly towards her mistress, and her mistress finding herself despised, complained to Abram, and began also to behave harshly towards her. The wrong element would not work in Abram's family; it might do very well for the Canaanites around him; but in a house where God was feared, it was an evil principle, and could not work for peace or holiness. Hagar's high Egyptian spirit, finding herself likely to be famous in the house,

would not brook the rule of her mistress, nor could Sarai, the quiet, but queenly matron, put up with the insults of her slave. The mistress became hard and harsh to her handmaid. Wrought into a frenzy, Hagar flies from the tent, and makes the best of her way on the road to Egypt, whence she originally came. But what could a lone woman do in her condition, all alone in the wilderness?

Wearied with her journey, she spies a fountain, and she sits there. It was the likeliest place for any passing traveller to find her, and she sits her down there in her proud despair. Perhaps they will send for her; Abram may repent his yielding to Sarai, and send for her; she will wait there; and if nothing comes to her help, she will die rather than return. She does not appear at that time to have lifted up her heart in prayer to God. She had lived in a godly household; but possibly, as she thought herself ill-treated, she had conceived a dislike towards the God of her mistress; such harsh treatment as she had received was not likely to incline her towards the religion of those from whom she had fled: she was godless and hopeless. Do you not see her crouching at the fountain, half mad with pride and vexation, and at the same time stricken with a sullen despair? She knows not what she is to do, neither does any way of hope open before her. Alas, poor Hagar!

But although there was no prayer of hers for God to hear, another voice spake in his ear. The angel who suddenly appeared to her said, "The Lord hath heard thy affliction." That is a very beautiful sentence. Thou hast not prayed: thou hast been wilful, reckless, and at last despairing, and therefore thou hast not cried unto the Lord. But thy deep sorrow has cried to him. Thou art oppressed, and the Lord has undertaken for thee. Thou art suffering heavily, and God, the All-pitiful, has heard thy affliction. Grief has an eloquent voice when mercy is the listener. Woe has a plea which goodness cannot resist. Though sorrow and woe ought to be attended with prayer, yet even when supplication is not offered, the heart of God is moved by misery itself. In Hagar's case, the Lord heard her affliction: he looked forth from his glory upon that lone Egyptian woman who was in the deepest distress in which a woman could well be placed, and he came speedily to her help.

We have not much difficulty in deciding who the angel was that appeared to her. We are sure that this Angel of the Lord was that great messenger of the covenant who was afterwards to appear in actual flesh and blood, but who many a time before he was born at Bethlehem anticipated his descent to earth, and visited it in human form. His delights were ever with the sons of men; and so when there was a message to be brought to men, that blessed One, the Second Person of the divine Unity condescended to be the bearer of it. In the present instance I discern foreshadowings of the Son of man; I perceive sure traces of the Christ who in a later age would dwell among mankind. Read a little before the text, and you will find it written, The angel of the Lord "found her"; it is the deed of the good Shepherd to find a lost sheep. I see before me that Son of man who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Surely this is that great Shepherd of the sheep who goeth after his sheep until he find it! He had come far into the waste after her, and he rested not until he found her. Great gladness

filled his heart, as when a merchantman findeth a pearl of great price. I see high joy in the countenance of this angel of Jehovah. We read in verse seven, "The angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water." Significant place! Can you forget how, when that blessed One was here in flesh and blood, he found another woman at the well. "Jesus being wearied, sat thus on the well. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink." Does not this story of Hagar read like a rehearsal of that Samaritan incident? "He found her by a fountain of water."

This fountain is further said to be "in the wilderness." Note that. Remember those words of his when he actually became incarnate: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it?" Again we read, "He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness." This wonderful appearance of the Christ before he actually assumed our flesh, has a likeness to his actual incarnation of the most delightful kind. 'Tis he; we are sure it is he. All the tones of the voice and the modes of the speech are his. That this angel of the Lord was God we also know, for our text says, "She called the name of Jehovah that spake unto her, Thou God seest me." The all-seeing God had veiled himself in that angelic form. That Divine One, whom we adore as the Son of God and the Son of man, condescended to be the messenger of mercy to a poor slave-woman, who had run away from her mistress. None but God would thus have condescended. The world had no pity in those days for slaves of any kind, much less for those who had left their master's house. Here the Lord of love found a noble opportunity for revealing his gracious nature to a forlorn one. No eye pitied her, and no hand brought her deliverance; "Now will I arise, saith the Lord." The angel found her, and it is of that finding, and of what came of it, that I am going to speak this morning. May the Holy Spirit cause the word to be with power.

I. In speaking of Hagar, I shall first dwell for a little upon HER REMARKABLE EXPERIENCE. I pray that to some daughter of sorrow the like experience may come. May your case be mirrored in that of Hagar, as when one seeth his face in a looking-glass.

Observe that *Hagar had outlawed herself.* No doubt she had much to put up with; but she had been insolent and provoking to her mistress, and at last she had in her impatience deliberately quitted the house of Abraham, and left the abode of the chosen family. Whatever that house may have been, it was the best place then upon the earth; it was almost the only spot under heaven where the Lord God was known. You might have said of Abraham's family, "Ye are of God, little children, and the whole world lieth in the wicked one." She, an Egyptian, once benighted by the superstitious worship of her country, had enjoyed the light of the knowledge of the true God for a while; and now she had turned her back on it. She could not but have marked Abraham's high character and sincere devotion. She must have seen his true and real faith in God, and the way in which he endeavoured to order his household aright. Whatever faults she may have perceived there, whatever errors she may have suffered from, she

could not but have noticed that there was a great difference between Abraham's tent and the abodes of Egypt. Now she quits her place of privilege, she renounces the high hopes which surrounded her, and in her fierce passion she rushes she cares not whither. The untamable spirit which afterwards showed itself in her son Ishmael raged in her bosom. So, too, have we met with those who have deliberately left the ways of God and the people of God, and all semblance of goodness, because they have thought themselves badly used. They have happened to suffer somewhat, and in the bitterness of their spirit they have resolved to stand no more of it. They vow that they will have nothing to do with God, or with his people ; they will turn their backs upon everything that is religious, and they will mix with the world in its most ungodly form. They do not, indeed, care what becomes of them : they would flee from the presence of God himself if they could. Friends, relatives, good men, and the circle of blessing they would quit, and roam in a wilderness, hoping to be forgotten. Now their hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against them, and in their high spirit they are prepared to defy the universe to subdue them.

While she was there, in the moment of her desperation, *she was found by the angel.* He had come on purpose to seek her out and find her, and he had not failed in his search, as, indeed, he never does. This was the last thing she thought of. She may have hoped to have been found by some merchants going towards Egypt, or to be picked up by certain of the wandering gipsies of the wilderness, but she had not thought that God himself would come after her. What was there about her that Jehovah should come out of his place to seek her ? Yet he came in unexpected grace, as he is wont to do. He remembered the low estate of his handmaiden, and because his mercy endureth for ever, he found her by the fountain in the wilderness.

When the angel of the Lord found Hagar, *he dealt graciously with her.* Indeed this was the object of his finding her; he came in pity, not in wrath. His first act was to awaken conviction within her. He said to her, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go ?" This language is singularly like the Lord Jesus Christ's mode of address. The name of the person is mentioned. This forcibly brings to my mind the speech of Our Lord when he said unto the woman, "Mary" ; and she turned herself, and said unto him, "Rabboni." He says, "Hagar, Sarai's maid" : his word is a personal word, and she cannot mistake it. Is not this the Lord's way in other cases ? Has he not said, "I have called thee by thy name"? He adds her description, and reminds her that whatever else she might be, she was "Sarai's maid." How surprised she must have been! She had never seen the august personage before, but evidently he had seen her before, and knew all about her, for his words searched her through and through.

Then, further to bring her to her right senses, the angel asks her, with touching pathos of tone,—"Whence camest thou ?" What hast thou left behind thee ? What hast thou given up ? All thy hopes lie in Abraham's tent, and thou hast left the place. For thee there is a high destiny, and thou art flying from it. Thou art, after all, a favoured woman, and thou knowest it not ; thou art flying away from that which

will be thy blessedness! This is the question of the Holy Spirit to every runaway rebel. O wandering sinner, what art thou quitting? In fleeing from goodness, and God, and hope, and grace, dost thou know what thou art leaving?

Again, he asks her, "Whither wilt thou go?" Her crouching form is before him; she lifts up her eyes, all red with tears, and she weeps anew as he says, "And whither wilt thou go?" "Wilt thou go into the wilderness further, and die there of thirst and hunger? Wilt thou go down into Egypt, back to all the cruelties of that benighted land? Whither wilt thou go?" It is thus the Lord meets runaway sinners that are bent upon their own destruction, and he calls to them by name, and says, "Whence camest thou? What art thou leaving? What art thou losing? What art thou rejecting? What art thou turning thy back upon? And whither wilt thou go? What can be the end of such a life as thine? Whither can it carry thee but to destruction? Whither wilt thou go by this course of desperate sin? Canst thou face the Eternal, and the judgment-seat, and the curse that withers the ungodly? Whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?" It is thus, I say, that the covenant Angel met with many of us, when he aroused our consciences and made us pause in our headlong rush of sin. Some of us heard the warning voice long years ago, and we can never forget it: the call rings in the chambers of our memory even now. It is thus that the Lord met with some of you a short time since; and you are at this moment filled with gratitude for the interposition. I believe that this morning the Lord will thus meet with some who are in this congregation, whom I know not, but whom he knows right well; for his eye is resting on them now, and his voice is speaking to them through my voice. Like as he said of old, "Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go?" so doth he speak at this hour, and ask you why you are bent upon destroying your own souls.

This wrought in her mind *conviction*, after a certain sort; and where the Son of God spiritually speaks to the heart, a deep and piercing conviction is felt: his word lays sin bare and open, and makes the guilty conscience feel that nothing is hidden from God, but that all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. As when the butcher hangs up the body of a beast, and with a stroke lays bare the heart and inwards of the creature, so with a single word the Angel of the covenant reveals the heart of Hagar. Thus also the convincing Spirit deals with the sinner, and lays him bare even to the backbone, till all the secrets of his soul are revealed, and he cries, "Thou God seest me." The Word of the Lord, by revealing the thoughts and intents of the heart, proves its own divine origin to him who feels its operation, and thus God himself is made known as speaking by the Word.

When he had thus wrought conviction in her, the angel who had found Hagar next gave her *an exhortation*. He said to her, "Return unto thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." A hard message, as it seemed to her in her pride, no doubt. "Return," however hard the way; "Submit thyself," however humiliating the deed. Hagar is not spared; the angel puts his words very plainly. If it were kindness to

say, "Return," it is still greater kindness to say severely, but truthfully, "Return to thy mistress." Mark, not to thy master only, but "to thy mistress." He says also, "Submit thyself under her hands," to show that the submission must be entire and absolute. Put thyself back into thy right place, and then grace can deal with thee. When the covenant Angel deals with any man or woman among us, he will say, "Return, return, return. Repent, and be converted. Turn ye; turn ye, why will ye die?" The gospel does not spare the sinner the pangs of repentance. It calls him to sorrow after a godly sort. You must abhor your sin, and flee from it, or your sin will be your ruin. You must so repent of your sin as to make such restitution as may be possible. You must replace stolen goods, and recall false words. You must humble yourself wherein you have been insolent; you must bow yourself down before God, and submit to man also, so far as you have wronged him. God the Holy Spirit, when he deals with a proud, unrighteous heart, lays justice to the line and righteousness to the plummet, and sweeps away as with hail every refuge of lies. He cries, "Return! Submit!" and puts the matter so closely home that there is no misunderstanding it. He bids the man confess, and forsake his sin; and gives him no hope of mercy, unless he will do so. God has not met with you, friend, if you go on in your sin. God in mercy has not met with you if sin remains sweet to you, and repentance is unknown to your heart. You must go back to the place from whence you came, and you must submit yourself, or nothing will go right with you.

When the angel of the Lord had thus spoken with Hagar, calling her by her name, and working conviction in her heart, and pointing out her duty, he then added *rich promises*—promises which to her mind must have been very unexpected and consoling. She was a runaway slave girl, but he says to her, "I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude, and thou shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael." That name signifies, "God heareth me," because the Lord had heard her affliction. The angel went on to tell her what this child should be who would be the joy of her heart. Little does a sinner know what blessings are in store for him, if he repents and submits to the Lord's will. He is come to the borders of the wilderness of death, but God intends to bring him back to peace, and joy, and happiness. Oh, did the proud sinner know what God's grace will do for him, he would break his heart to think he had been so rebellious! Oh, did the obstinate know what a place there is at the Father's board and in the Father's heart for the returning prodigal, and how much he is still beloved, notwithstanding all his naughtiness, he would quicken his footsteps, and wish to have wings upon his heels, that he might fly back to his Father's house and his Father's bosom! O soul, I do pray that Jesus Christ may find thee out this morning, and say to thee, "Return unto me, for I have blotted out thy sins like a cloud, and like a thick cloud thine iniquities. Return unto me, for I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

So you see, Hagar's experience was a very remarkable one, although by no means peculiar to herself. Blessed be God, it has happened to tens of thousands, that where sin abounded, grace did much more abound,

When they have run away, and outlawed themselves, grace has followed them, grace has convicted them, grace has admonished them, and grace has made large promises to them. Their proud heart has yielded, and their spirit has become gentle as that of a little child, as Hagar's spirit was, and they have returned to the great Father's house, and submitted themselves, and rich blessings have become theirs. Is it not written, "If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land"? Though Hagar had banished herself away from the house of divine favour, yet the Lord devised means for restoring her, and she was restored. Thus much on her remarkable experience.

II. Now, I want you to notice HER DEVOUT ACKNOWLEDGMENT. When that which we have described happened to her, she acknowledged the living God. My text says, "She called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me." *She spake to him that spake to her:* after this fashion do we all begin our communion with God. Oh, when God speaks to you, you will soon find a tongue to speak to him. I do not mean when *I* speak to you in his name; for what am I? You ought to hear us if we truly speak for God, since it is of his kindness that he sends his servants to speak to you: but if the covenant Angel comes himself, and if he speaks to the heart, then he unstops the deaf ear, and looses the dumb tongue. Men soon speak to Christ when Christ speaks to them. Did you but know the power of the Almighty word of grace, you would understand that as darkness gave place to light when he said, "Let there be light," so do men's hearts quit their sin when Jesus speaks to them in tones of effectual grace. Hagar knew no speaking to God till God spake with her; but after he had spoken to her there was no silence.

What did she say? *She acknowledged him to be God.* "She called the name of the Lord that spake to her, Thou God seest me." It is one thing to believe there is a God, but it is quite another thing to know it by coming into personal contact with him. They give you books to prove that there is a God—all well and good; be convinced by them. They tell you to walk abroad and see God in his works. Do so. You cannot better employ yourselves; for God is everywhere. His breath perfumes the flowers, and his pencil paints them. But you will not learn God in this fashion, if you use this method by itself. To go from nature up to nature's God is a long step for broken legs: we are so mangled by our fall that we never take that step without divine help. But, oh, if the Lord meets with you! If he reveals his own self to your heart! What assurance! What certainty! Think not I am talking now of things that are not: I speak what I have myself felt. God has met with some of us as surely as ever one spirit has met with another. Men have so spoken to us at times, that we can never forget their speech; but never has human voice come with such force as that of the Lord of hosts, the accents of whose words we shall hear as long as memory holds her place and reason sits on her throne. We may forget the word of father, mother, wife, or friend, but not the voice of the God of love. "When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek." None doubt the existence of God when God has come into contact with their spirit. When we have felt his power and tasted his love, and known his overwhelming influence,

then have we said, "Jehovah, he is the God," and we have bowed in solemn worship before him. I do not know that Hagar had ever thought of God before; but she discerns him now and speaks wisely. No doubt she had heard of Jehovah, for she had joined in the devotions of Abraham's family; but now for the first time in her life she recognizes in deed and of a truth that the Lord lives for her, and therefore she speaks to him, and calls him, "The God that sees."

Observe, dear friends, that *she acknowledged his observant love.* She could not help acknowledging it, for it flashed before her eyes. I do not think when she said, "Thou God seest me," that she meant merely that God is omniscient and therefore that he saw her; but she meant this, "Thou seest *me*, with a special observation. Thou seest *me* with eyes of tender concern and loving care. Thou knowest me in my adversity." She felt in her inmost soul that eyes of thoughtful love were fixed on her. "Hagar, Sarai's maid," knew that she was specially under watchful care. Those holy eyes had noticed all her sin, which had been brought to her remembrance; those eyes had seen her duty, which she was now willing to resume; those eyes had spied out the promise for her, which promise had brought a warm comfort to her poor, chill spirit. "Oh," said she, "what a God thou art—the God who sees, who knows, who considers, and thinks of me!" Now she has a God, not in theory, but in fact. You that only know God as one who made the heavens and earth, do not indeed know him at all. He must be personally a God to you, or he will not be your God at all. To us the true God is the God who seeth us. Doth not his law begin, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"? His special care is the mark by which we know him. It was so in Hagar's case; God's watchful care towards her made him real to her. She knew that he must be God; she could not doubt it, for she had been so strangely found out by him. In the extremity of her lost estate, when she had gone to the uttermost of sin and sorrow, he had found her out, and so she calls him, "the God that sees me."

In the presence of that God she felt overpowered and ready to yield. She was so overwhelmed, that no rebellion remained within her. She girds her garments about her, and she makes the best of her way home to the tent of Sarai. Her mistress is hard; but sin is harder. She will go back and bear the reproach and rebuke, for she has a promise hidden in her heart to sustain her; she shall yet be the glad mother of a father of nations who shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. She returns surrounded with God. Bathed in the sense of the divine oversight, she resigns herself to her work. Though Abram should not encourage her, and Sarai should not acknowledge her, yet the Lord's eye would be upon her, and God's favour was preparing great things for her. Her heart was light within her, because of the divine favour, and in that spirit she was subdued unto the will of God. That is what I want to happen to many a poor soul this morning in a still fuller and more spiritual sense. Pray, you people of God, that it may be so. If *you* are here this morning, Mistress Sarah, let me put in a gentle word for your poor maid. If she does come back to you, do not treat her harshly again; do not drive her away again; but receive the runaway and

make the best of her. Let the past be buried. Say, "If an angel has appeared to thee, and taught thee to know the Lord, I will gladly receive thee, and show the kindness of God unto thee."

III. Let me now call to your notice THE MANIFEST AMAZEMENT of this woman; for in her glad surprise she uttered a sentence which runs as follows: "Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" This is a sentence very hard to be understood; not because it is hard to make out a meaning, but because it is so full of meaning. It reads like an oracle. Expositors will tell you that as many senses may be given to this sentence as there are words in it; and each one of these senses will bear a measure of decent defence. I shall not go into them all, but I think I see clearly that *she was amazed that God should care for her.* "Thou God seest me. Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" Does he see *me?* Do I see *him?* If I had loved God when I was in Sarai's tent, I could have understood his following me here; if I had sought him when I was with Abram, and had known my master's God in Canaan, I could have understood that he should remember me now: but I was a wild Egyptian; I would not bow my knee to Jehovah; no, I had no wish nor thought for the living God; yet hath he looked after me, the slave girl, for whom nobody cared! He hath spoken to me concerning things to come." Brethren, it is a great wonder to me this day that ever my God should think of me. Brothers, sisters, do you not share that feeling, each one for yourself? Do you not say, "Why me, my Lord? Why me"? Sit still in holy wonder, and adore and bless the Lord.

I think *her next amazement was that she should have been such a long time without ever thinking of him who had thought so much of her.* She says, "Have I also here looked unto him that seeth me?" "What! Have I been these years with Abraham, and heard about the God who has been looking at me in love, and have I never glanced a thought to him?" Her ungodliness astounds her. Brother, when you are brought to God it will strike you as though a dart went through your flesh, that you should so long have done despite to God and heavenly things. Then will you say, "Have I forgotten Christ? Have I forgotten God? Has he had designs of love to me, and purposes of grace for me, and yet have I rebelled against him? Did he die for me, and did I refuse to live for him? Did he bleed his life away on the cross for me, and have I been all these years thoughtless and careless of him?" It will stagger you; you will feel ready to sink into the dust when you once feel the folly and meanness of your course. You can bluster, you can be proud and careless, when you know not God; but when you once fully meet with him, you will be ready to bite your tongues to think you could have lived so long in ignorance and neglect of your God. Hagar was evidently startled as she remembered that she had never up till that time looked to the observing One.

But next, *she is amazed still more to think that at last she does look unto God.* In effect she cries, "What! Has it come to this? Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? Is Hagar at last converted? When I had bread to eat I never looked after God, and now that I have come into this wilderness, do I seek and find him? No creature can hear my call, and do I now call upon my Creator? I am alone, alone,

alone; there is nothing here but this well, and lo! the angel of Jehovah has found me and spoken with me, and now in this wild place I for the first time look after the Lord who has looked after me. Is this the place, the spot of ground, where I must needs close in with my Maker and know that there is a God, and believe his promise, and begin to live in expectation of its fulfilment?" It might well astound her. Perhaps somebody has come into this service this very day, almost driven to desperation: you have acted so wrongly—I cannot tell how wrongly—and now you are smarting from the consequences of your foolishness. If God is meeting with you this morning you will cry out in astonishment, "What! Have I come hither to find God? Have I come into this miserable condition that I might be driven to look after him? This is surprising grace!" An old man in the country was a gracious father, and brought up his children in the fear of the Lord; but his son while yet a youth must needs see life in London, and therefore he came to the great city, and plunged into all sorts of sin. He cared nothing for the Sabbath, but even felt glad to escape from the weariness of the meeting-house to which he had been taken from his infancy. It was no design of his ever to find God, but God found him in the most unlikely of all the places in the world, namely, in a low play-house. A scene occurred in which a mutinous sailor was to be hanged, and asking for a glass of spirits he was represented as drinking his own health in the words—"Here's to my immortal soul." "Immortal soul," thought the foolish youth, "Immortal soul." He had almost forgotten that he had an immortal soul. It was a shot fired at the centre of the target: it struck him home; he was ready to drop: he sought the open air and a place wherein to weep. The next Sabbath morning found the young scapegrace at a prayer-meeting, seeking his father's God, and before long he found peace through the blood of Jesus, and began preaching the gospel which he had so grievously abused. God knows how to get at the heart of sinners. Remember Colonel Gardiner about to commit a foul offence; he made an assignation, and reached the spot an hour too soon, and while he waited he saw, or thought he saw, his Saviour, and heard a voice accusing him of ingratitude. He fled the place of his temptation, sought for pardon, and became eminent as a saint. What a surprise it must be to rebels to be thus seized in the arms of grace and transformed into friends of the King! I ask God that such a surprise may await some who are here to-day. May you also enquire in amazement, "Have I here also looked after him that seeth me?"

One other surprise Hagar had, and that was *the surprise to think that she was alive.* It was the common conviction of that age that no man could see God and live. She knew that she had seen him in angelic form, and she marvelled that she found herself alive and able to look up with hope. The awakened sinner, when he is met with by the God of grace wonders that he has not been cut down as a cumberer of the ground. If the Lord had met with me in a way of vengeance, and caused me to wither away from the root like the fruitless fig-tree, I could not have wondered; but to bless me in infinite compassion is a wonder indeed. If he had sentenced me to depart to the lowest hell I could not have complained; but to meet me in love, to pardon, relieve, and save

me—this is a miracle of grace. Does the Lord say, 'I receive thee to my heart, and I intend to bless thee henceforth and for ever'? Then does he act like a God. Who but he would speak thus? His grace awakens an amazement which is not soon forgotten or easily expressed. The soul cries in surprise and delight—

"Depth of mercy, can there be
Mercy still reserved for me?
Can my God his wrath forbear?
Me, the chief of sinners, spare?
I have long withstood his grace,
Long provoked him to his face.
Tell it unto sinners, tell,
I am, I am out of hell!"

IV. My time has fled, or I should have asked you to notice HER HUMBLE WORSHIP. Her humble worship was expressed by her using an expressive name for the angel of the Lord. She worshipped God heartily and intelligently, *according to her knowledge.* She did not use the first word that came to hand, but she spake fitly, thoughtfully, and well. She knew that the Lord was the seeing God, for he had seen her; and so she worshipped him under that title, "Thou God seest me." We cannot worship "The Unknown God"; at least, such worship lacks eyes and light, and is fitter for owls and bats than for man.

Yet be it observed that she worshipped beyond her knowledge, *according to her apprehension;* for she said, "Have I here also looked *after* him?" as if she knew that she had not fully seen the Lord, but had only looked at him as he retreated from her. Like Moses, in a later day, she had only beheld the back parts of God, the skirts of his garments; his face she had not seen. The Hebrew has that force. Hagar felt there was much more of God than she had seen, and in that belief she worshipped and adored with lowliest reverence.

Her worship was *wonderfully personal.* It is not "God sees," but "Thou God seest me"; and it is not, "Has God looked after his creature?" but "Have I here also looked after him that seeth me?" True religion is always personal, but it becomes wonderfully so when a man is specially arrested by sovereign grace; for then he adores as if he were the only man in the universe, and beholds God as if no other eye throughout all the ages had ever beheld him. Oh, it is wonderful to feel alone with the Lord, while the Lord is searching you through and through.

Remark again, that her worship proved itself deeply true, for it was followed by immediate *practical obedience* to the command of the Lord. Obedience is the best of worship. She returned unto her mistress, and was ubject unto her. Oh for grace this morning, if God meets with us, not o tarry a single minute in rebellion, but to return at once to subjection to the Lord! Oh, to cry with Thomas, "My Lord and my God," and then to live henceforth as in his sight! It were well to keep the finger for ever in the print of the nails, that we might never lose our fellowship with Jesus, nor our joy in the great Father, nor our subjection to the ever-blessed Spirit of all grace.

V. We will conclude by glancing for an instant at the well which became THE SUGGESTIVE MEMORIAL of this special manifestation and singular experience. That well—we do not know what it had been

called before—but that Beer, or well, was henceforth called Beér-lahai-roi, or the well of him that liveth and seeth. Will we not all at this time drink of that well? It was a very happy thought to attach a holy name to a well, so that every traveller might learn of God as he refreshed himself. When a person comes to drink at certain fountains, he reads, "Drink, gentle traveller, drink and pray." The inscription is most suitable. It is fit that men should pray when they receive so precious a refreshment as pure water. It was specially meet that travellers should henceforth and for ever pray at a spot where the Lord himself had been, and had called to himself a wanderer who had felt compelled to cry, "God lives, and God sees."

Brethren, there is a God, and we know it. He is not an abstraction far away; but he is a reality, and sees and observes, and takes care of men and women. Many of us have proved this to be a fact. Now, next time you eat, worship him that lives and sees; next time you drink, worship him that lives and sees. Let our tables and our wells remind us of him who removes our hunger and quenches our thirst.

Better still, let this very name of God—"the living and the seeing One"—be as a well of water to you, for the comfort of your hearts. By this may your griefs be assuaged. "Mother is dead!" What a loss is the death of a mother to many a girl, and to many a young man! "Mother is dead" is the token of temptation without defence. Such a stay and holdfast mother often is, that when she is gone Satan gets a dire advantage over a young soul. Yet if mother be gone, the Lord lives, and all the gentleness and kindness of a mother are treasured up in him. God lives: think of that, and be comforted. This well is never dry. Your father is dead, or your dear, kind brother is dead, and you are left alone to bear the buffetings of a cruel world. Never mind. Let not your heart fail you. Do not run away. God lives and sees. He in whom is all fatherhood, and all friendship, and all kindness, still stands near you watching for your good. Come and drink at this well. The waters are cool and clear. Drink, and live. Did I hear you cry out in anguish, "Nobody cares for me"? Do you say, "Nobody knows me in this terrible city. Here I am in this great London as much deserted as Robinson Crusoe on his lone island"? I know what you mean. London is worse than a wilderness to many; a man may lay himself down and die in these streets, and nobody will care for him. The millions will pass him by; not for want of kindness, but from want of thought. There is no such horrible wilderness as a wilderness of men. Yet, take comfort: the living God sees thee! He seeth not as man seeth, with a mere gaze of cold notice; but his heart goes with his eye. You have not prayed yet, but he hears your affliction. Oh, begin to pray, and he will speedily deliver! Spread your case before him, and he will regard your petition. I would encourage you to get alone, if you are in sorrow and sin, and tell it all out before God, and see if he does not deliver you. Some of us have gone to him in plights as terrible as yours, and we have ordered our cases before him, and he has answered us. We can truly say, "He hath delivered us"; and therefore we encourage you to seek his face in like manner. May the Lord bring you to seek him at once, for his great love's sake, and then to him shall be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

BUT A STEP.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, NOVEMBER 29TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON SEPTEMBER 13TH, 1885.

"There is but a step between me and death."—1 Samuel xx. 3.

THIS was David's description of his own condition. King Saul was seeking to destroy him. The bitter malice of that king would not be satisfied with anything short of the blood of his rival. Jonathan did not know this. He could not believe so badly of his father as that he could wish to kill the champion of Israel, the brave, true-hearted young David; and so he assured David that it could not be so—that he had not heard of any plots against him. But David, who knew better, said, "It is certainly so. Your father seeks my blood, and there is but a step between me and death."

Now, it was by knowing his danger that David escaped. Had he remained as ignorant of his own peril as his friend Jonathan had been, he would have walked into the lion's mouth, and he would have fallen by the hand of Saul. But to be forewarned is to be forearmed; he was, therefore, able to save his life because he perceived his danger. It would have been a very unwise person who should have said, "Do not tell David about it. You see that he is very happy in Jonathan's company. Do not disturb him. It will only make him fret. Do not tell him about Saul's anger." But a true and wise friend would acquaint David of his danger, in order that he might seize the opportunity to escape. So also to-night somebody might say, "Many people now present are in great danger, and do not dare to think about death; do not mention the unpleasant subject to them." Well, sirs, if my object were to please you, if my desire were to seem as one who playeth a merry tune upon a goodly instrument, I certainly should not speak to you of death and danger. But, then, it would be infamous to allow men and women to stand in infinite jeopardy and not to warn them; and it is kindness to speak to those who are carelessly at ease and tell them salutary truth. It will not put them in danger; but it may, God blessing it, be the means of their escaping from eternal ruin. So, I pray you, while I talk

upon this theme, which may seem to be a sad one, ask God to make it a great blessing to those who hitherto have been sporting upon the brink of fate without thinking of the solemnities of eternity.

It is rather a notable state of things, is it not, for David to be conscious of danger, and to be telling his friend Jonathan that he is in danger? I do not often meet with the case now. If I am the Jonathan, I have to keep on warning David of his danger, and I find it very difficult to wake up my friend to a sense of that danger. I should like to live to see the day in which David would come to Jonathan—I mean in which men in danger would come to me—and say, "There is but a step between me and death." We love to see care for the soul, and concern about a future state. Whenever God's Holy Spirit is at work we do see it: sinners begin to be aware of their condition, and they come and tell us of their danger, and enquire for the way of escape. It is the simplest thing in the world to tell the awakened sinner how he may find peace; the difficulty lies in awakening the sinner. To cheer those who are alarmed is such good work that we would sit up all night at it. We can never have too much of it. To bind up the broken in heart when the Master gives us his gospel, is the most pleasant duty out of heaven. The worst of it is, that we cannot persuade them that they need to be broken in heart, or lead them to feel that they are in peril; but still shutting their eyes to all the truth they will go wildly on, determined not to know. Too many act as if it were folly to look a few days ahead, as if it were a work of supererogation to foresee the evil, a needless sorrow to think of eternity.

To-night I want to press the truth home, as far as it is truth, upon each person here present, that there is, or there may be, but a step between him and death.

First, *in some sense this is true of everybody*, "There is a step, and but a step, between me and death." Secondly, *to some it is peculiarly true.* There are many persons—and some of them are here to-night—who might say with emphasis, "There is but a step between me and death." When I have spoken upon those two things, I shall then say, "*Suppose that it is not so*"; and conclude by saying, "*Suppose that it is so.*"

I. First, then, there is a sense in which this text is no doubt literally TRUE OF EVERY MAN—"There is but a step between me and death"; for *life is so short* that it is no exaggeration to compare it to a step. Suppose that we should live to threescore years and ten, or even fourscore years, or to be, as some few of our friends are here to night, even past their fourscore years, yet life will occupy a very short time. Life is long to look forward to; but I appeal to every aged person whether it is not very short to look back upon. I confess to my own experience that a week is now a hardly appreciable space of time to me. There seems to be very little breathing room between one Sunday and another. One has scarcely preached before one has to prepare again some other word with which to address you. As we grow older time very sensibly quickens its pace. I know that this is an exceedingly trite observation, but I mention it all the more earnestly because the certainty of it should force it home with power upon our minds. You young people look to a month as being quite a period of time, but when you are getting forty, or fifty, or sixty, you will look upon a whole year as no more than a brief

interval. Indeed, I do not wonder that Jacob said his years were few. Because he was an old man he thought life short. If he had been a young man he would have said that his days were comparatively many, and would have tried to make himself feel that he had lived a long while; but when a man grows old his days seem fewer than they were, and the older he gets the shorter his life seems to have been. There are many ways of calculating time, and its length or brevity lies more in idea than in fact. I have sometimes noticed it—I dare say you have—that an hour has seemed to me very long indeed. In certain states of mind I have looked to the clock again and again, and I have thought that I never lived such a long hour. But often and often does it occur to me that I sit down to write, and that I go on writing, and when I lift up my head an hour has passed, and I think to myself, "It cannot be. There is a mistake. That clock has made a mistake somehow." I have even referred to my watch, and I have found that it was even so; but where that hour went I do not know. When one is very busy the hours glide away, so that you say, "Time is, after all, only a dream." Time may appear to be long while it is short, and it may be really short when according to human calculation it is long. But all men when they come to die confess that their life has been brief—that it was but a step. Yesterday I was born: to-day I live: to-morrow I must die. Ephemera are born and die in the space between the rising and the setting sun; their life is a fair picture of our own. We are shadows, and we come and go with the rising and the setting sun. Truly "there is but a step between me and death." O my God, if my life be so short, prepare me for its end! Help me to stand ready for its close, so that I may give in my final account with joy.

But, in another sense, there is but a step between us and death, namely, that *life is so uncertain.* How unexpectedly it ends! Strong and hearty men, if I might make a judgment from observation, seem to be among the first to fall. How often have I seen the invalid, who might almost long for death, draw out a long existence of continuous pain; while the man who shook your hand with a powerful grip, and stood erect like a column of iron, is laid low of a sudden and is gone! No man can reckon upon the full term of life: not one among us can be sure of reaching threescore and ten. We cannot be sure that we shall see old age. A bubble is more solid than human life, and a spider's web is as a cable compared with the thread of our existence. There is but a step between us and death.

And this is all the more true when we consider that *there are so many gates to the grave.* We can die anywhere, at any time, by any means. Not alone abroad are we in danger, but at home in security we are still in peril. I am in my pulpit now, but I am not secure in this citadel from all-besieging death. I remember a dear servant of God in a country town, on a certain Sabbath morning, stood up and repeated as the first hymn of the morning, the sacred song which I gave out just now:

> "Father, I long, I faint to see
> The place of thine abode:
> I'd leave thine earthly courts and flee
> Up to thy seat, my God";

and he fell back and was gone. His wish was granted. He saw the place of God's abode, I do not doubt. There is no safety from death in the pulpit, nor in your own house. Dr. Gill, who was noted for always being in his study, said one day to a friend, "Well, at least, if a man is in his study he is safe." Some one had been killed in the street through a falling chimney-pot or tile, and this gave emphasis to the doctor's pleasantry. But it so happened that, soon after, the doctor went to visit a member of his church, and while he was away a stormy wind blew, and blew down a stack of chimneys into his study, into the very place where he would have been sitting if he had not been called away. So he said to his friend, "Verily, I see I must not boast of being safe in my study, for we are secure nowhere." In times of battle men may shelter behind trees or walls, and so escape rifle-shot: but where can you get to escape from the arrows of death? Wherever you be, not alone in the crowded, thronging streets, but up there in your own chamber, or on the edge of your bed, you may slip, you may fall, and suffer fatal injury. At your table you may eat and drink and die. Wherever you are, you may well feel, "There is but a step between me and death."

"Dangers stand thick through all our path
To push us to the tomb;
And fierce diseases wait around
To hurry mortals home."

Therefore, I would say, as I leave this point, let nobody here reckon upon life. Let him never postpone what ought to be done at once to some future time. I do not know whether any brother here recollects old Mr. Timothy East. I knew him well in his old age. He was a man of careful observation and retentive memory, and in his later days he was full of stories which had happened in his pastoral experience; and he used to tell this one:—A certain woman was very much attached to his ministry, but still a very foolish woman. She used to sit regularly on the pulpit stairs, and she did so for many years, while Timothy East preached the gospel. One thing seemed to shut her heart against all his appeals. She told a neighbour that if she had five minutes before she died, she so understood the way of salvation that she would get all right in that time. She told her minister that, and Timothy said to her, "Oh, that will never do. You may not have that five minutes in which to set things right. Be right at once." Singularly enough, one day, as Mr. East went down the street, a child came to him, and said, "Please, sir, come and see grandmother. Come and see grandmother." He turned in, and there was grandmother struck for death. She looked at him with an entreating glance, and said, "I am lost! I am lost!" She died there and then, ere Mr. East could say a word to her about her salvation. Dear friend, I do beseech you not to imitate her folly, but rather say to yourself, "There is but a step between me and death. Therefore, now, God help me, I will lay hold upon eternal life, and seek and find in Christ the salvation that shall fit me to live, and fit me to die, and fit me to rise again, and fit me for the judgment-day, and fit me for eternal glory. "There is but a step between me and death"; there shall not be a step between me and Christ.

II. But, dear friends, I now turn to further remark that TO SOME THIS IS SPECIALLY TRUE. Will you bear with me when I remark that to persons who have reached a ripe old age this is most certainly true: "There is but a step between me and death"? It is inevitable in the order of nature that you should not live long. Now, do not object to think about it and talk about it. It is only foolish persons who will not mention death. If you are all right with God, it can be no trouble to you to remember that as your years multiply, there must be so many the fewer in which you are to abide here below. Those also have but a step between them and death who are touched with some incurable disorder. Some are warned that they have a heart complaint. If that be the case I may fairly say, "There is but a step between you and death." If you are consumptive, and are gradually melting away, you are in like case. What a blessing it is that this form of death gives us notice of its approach, and does not impair the mind, so that a person may calmly seek and find eternal life if that disease has marked him for its own! But there is only a step between the consumptive and death. Those who follow dangerous trades are in a similar condition. The traveller across the deep, the fisherman, the soldier, the miner, and others are frequently at death's door. I need not go into the details of all those various processes by which men earn their bread, which have so much danger about them that there is but a step between those who follow them and death.

Besides this, there are some—and probably some in this congregation—who, whether it be by disease or not, will die in the course of a few weeks. The probabilities, if they are calculated, will show that out of six or seven thousand persons gathered here, there are certainly some, beyond all guesswork, who will not see the month of November, who certainly will never pass into the next year. There is but a step between such and death.

I should like you to be able to think about death. If you do not like to think about it at all, my dear friends, I think that there is something wrong in you, and you ought to take warning from your own dislike. He that is afraid of solemn things has probably solemn reason to be afraid of them. It is greatly wise to talk with our last hours. A man who is going to a certain place should think about the place to which he is going, and make some preparation for it. If he be a wise man he will do so. I should like you to attain to such a state that you could feel as Dr. Watts did. He said to a friend when he was an old man, "I go to my bed each night with perfect indifference as to whether I shall wake up in this world or the next." That is a beautiful state of mind to be in. Or, as the old Scotch minister said when some one asked him, "Is this disease of yours fatal"? and he replied, "I do not know, and I do not wish to know, for I do not think that it can make much difference to me; for if I go to heaven I shall be with God, and if I stop here God will be with me." Oh! is not that a sweet way of putting it? There is not so much difference, after all, between being with God and God's being with us. Old George the Third, who, whatever the faults of his early days, was undoubtedly a godly man in his old age, would have a mausoleum prepared for himself and family; and when Mr. Wyatt, the architect, went to see

him by his own order he did not know how to speak to the old king about his grave; but George said, "Friend Wyatt, do not mind speaking about my tomb. I can talk as freely to you about the preparation of a place for me to be buried in, as I could about a drawing-room for me to hold my court in; for I thank God that I am prepared to do my duty if I live, and to sleep in Jesus if I die." There are but few, I think, of his rank who could talk so; but every wise man ought to see to it that, as he must die, he is ready for it—ready for the bar of God. "Ready, ay, ready," says the sailor as he grinds his cutlass; and let the Christian say the same. Ready, ay, ready, to live to an extreme old age patiently waiting, or to depart out of the world unto the Father, which is far better; in any case finding it heaven enough to do the will of God, and to trust in Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent.

Thus I have mentioned the cases of those of whom it may specially be said, "There is but a step between me and death." "Oh," said some one, "you are the wrong side of sixty, Mr. Jones." "No," answered Jones, "I am on the right side of sixty, for I am the heaven side of it"; and that is the way to look at our age. We say,

"Nearer, my God, to thee,"

and then we do not like to grow old: that is absurd. Nay, let us rather rejoice that we are getting nearer the desired haven, nearer our everlasting rest.

III. I am to close by saying first, SUPPOSE IT IS NOT SO. Young friends, you that are here, suppose it is not true that there is only a step between you and death. Suppose it is not so. There may be some here that will live to a very great age. I may be addressing some persons who will rival Sir Moses Montefiore. Possibly you may. Well, what then? If so, I should recommend you to follow the Scriptural advice, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness." The first things should come first: the best things should have the best of our thoughts. A prince who had been warned of assassination, gaily exclaimed, "Serious things to-morrow"; but before to-morrow he was slain. Yet had he not been slain, his speech would have been an unwise one; for, however long we live, we ought not to push serious matters into a corner. If we are to live, let us live to noble purpose. It would be a great pity to lose a single year, much less a long life. If you are going to live a hundred years, begin them with God. If you are going to have long life, why not spend it for him? There was a storm at sea once, and there was a young man on board who was not used to storms, and he fell into a great state of mind. He was not of much use on board the ship through his fears. He crept into a corner and knelt down to pray; but the captain, on coming along, could not stand that. He shouted, "Get up, you coward, *say your prayers in fine weather.*" He did get up, saying to himself, "I only hope that I shall see fine weather to say my prayers in." When he landed, the words the captain said remained in his mind. He said, "That is quite correct, I will say my prayers in fine weather." I would say to you who hope to live a hundred years, *say your prayers in fine weather.* The young man was so impressed with those words that he went to hear the gospel, was converted, and became a minister of Christ.

One Sunday morning, while he was preaching in one of the most notable pulpits in New York, that captain came into the chapel, and the preacher looked him in the face and said, "Say your prayers in fine weather." The captain was astonished, as he perceived that the very man whom he had addressed as a coward was now preaching from the pulpit, and giving out at the commencement of his sermon the advice which he had given him. I trust the captain took his own medicine. I want to give that advice to all who do not think that they are going to die yet. *Say your prayers in fine weather.* Begin with God now. Oh, come and give my Lord Jesus the prime of your youth, the best of your days. I came to Christ when I was fifteen. I was a minister of the gospel when I was sixteen years of age. I have gone on preaching Christ ever since. I wish that I could have begun sixteen years before. I do not repent of coming to him too early; but I urge upon you, young friends, while yet the marrow is in your bones, and your brain is clear, and your eye is true; ere yet you have dishonoured yourself, and weakened your body by sin, come and yield yourselves up to Jesus Christ, that you may spend a whole life in that blessed service which is joy and peace. May the Holy Spirit of his great love make it so with many here present!

Suppose that it is not true that there is but a step between you and death; nevertheless, while death is at a distance, health and strength furnish the best time for coming to Christ. Do not imagine that when you are ill and near to die, it will be the best time to turn. I remember the striking words of Philip Henry, the father of the famous Matthew Henry. When he was dying, his friends stood round about his bed, and he said, "What a blessing it is, Matthew, that I have not to make my peace with God now! My body is full of pain, and my mind is greatly disturbed by reason of it. Oh!" said he, "if that were undone and had now to be done, how could it be done?" What a mercy when that great transaction is complete! Now, come pain or weakness, come long sleep, come broken-down spirit, what does it matter? It is all well; it is all well. That having *to make our peace with God* when we die is a poor business. I do not like the expression. I like far better the language of a poor bricklayer who fell from a scaffold, and was so injured that he was ready to die. The clergyman of the parish came, and said, "My dear man, I am afraid you will die. You had better make your peace with God." To the joy of the clergyman the man said, "Make my peace with God, sir? That was made for me upon Calvary's cross eighteen hundred years ago; and I know it." Ah! that is it—to have a peace that was made by the blood of Christ all those years ago—a peace that never can be broken. Then, come life, come death, ay, or come a lengthened life, and ripe old age, the best preparation for a lengthened life is to know the Lord. The best encouragement and comfort for the decrepitude of extreme old age is to have a good hope through Christ. There is nothing like it. Why, some old folks that I have known, so far from being unhappy, have been the very happiest people that I have ever met with, and though they have lived long, they have come, not to court long life, but they have been willing to depart. Dr. Dwight, the famous tutor, had a mother who lived to be over a hundred years of age; and one day, when the son heard the bell

toll for a neighbour, the old lady said with tears in her eyes, "Won't it soon toll for me? Will they not soon toll for me?" Dear Mr. Rowland Hill used merrily to say, when he got old, that he hoped that they had not forgotten him. That is how he came to look at death; and he would go to some old woman if he could, and sit down and say, "Now, dear sister, if you go before I go, mind that you give my love to John Bunyan and the other Johns. Tell them that Rowley is stopping behind a little while, but he is coming on as fast as he can." Oh! it is a sweet thing gradually to melt away and have the tenement gently taken down, and yet not to feel any trouble about it, but to know that you are in the great Father's hands, and you shall wake up where old age and infirmities will all have passed away, and where, in everlasting youth, you shall behold the face of him you love.

That is, suppose that it is not so.

IV. But now SUPPOSE THAT IT IS SO. Suppose that it is so, and suppose, as yet, that you have no good hope. Dear friend, there is a word that I would like to drop into your ear. If there is but a step between you and death, yet there is only a step between you and Jesus. There is only a step between you and salvation. God help you to take that step to-night. You know the description of the way to heaven: "Take the first on the right by the cross, and keep straight on." May you take that step to-night! It is not a step even; it is only a look.

"There is life in a look at the Crucified One."

Why delay it? Since faith in Christ will put you beyond danger, and will put you beyond the dominion of sin, so that you will live a godly life which shall continue to the end, why not believe in Jesus now? Why not cast yourself upon him now? For suppose it is so? suppose that it is written in the book, "Thou shalt die, and not live"; then is it not your wisdom that you should at once close in with Christ and find eternal salvation in him?

Suppose that it is so, that you are soon to die; then set your house in order. Get everything ready with regard to your temporal affairs. Mind that. A world of sorrow comes through people not having made their wills. Have everything in order. Trim the ship when a storm is expected. Be ready, for you are about to die. Now sit loose by all earthly things. You must assuredly part with them soon; do not hold them tightly. "Set not your affection upon things on earth," or you will weep when you lose your idols. If you harbour any anger in your heart, turn it out directly, for you are going to die. If there is any quarrel between you and anybody else, go home and settle it. Whether you are going to live or die, I advise you to do that. Hold no ill-will to any one, for you are so soon to die. I remember well the story of a husband who had grieved his wife. I do not know what had happened, —some little awkward word or deed. He went out of the house. He had to fell timber that day, and he turned back and said, "Wife, I am very sorry. Let us part good friends. Give me a kiss." Alas, she turned away! All day long she sorrowed, for she loved him well, and she grieved to think that he was gone without that kiss of love. He never came back again alive. Four men brought him home a corpse. She

would have given a thousand worlds if they had not parted so. Now, do not part with anybody that you love with any kind of tiffs or quarrellings. End all that, for death is near. If there is but a step between you and death—if the Judge is at the door—go and wind up your little difficulties. You that have family quarrels, wipe them out. You that have got any malice in your heart, turn it out.

Oh, if it is only a step between us and death, then you that are unprepared, it is only a step between you and hell! Escape, I pray you, by the living God. As you love your souls, flee for your lives, and lay hold on Christ.

But if you are in Christ, it is only a step between you and heaven. You may well desire that you might take that step right speedily. I shall never forget one summer afternoon, when I was preaching in a village chapel about the joys of heaven, that an elderly lady sitting on my right kept looking to me with intense delight. Some people's eyes greatly help the preacher. A telegraph goes on between us. She seemed to say to me, "Bless God for that. How I am enjoying it!" She kept drinking in the truth, and I poured out more and more precious things about the eternal kingdom and the sight of the Well-beloved, till I saw what I thought was a strange light pass over her face. I went on, and those eyes were still fixed on me. She sat still as a marble figure; and I stopped and said, "Friends, I think that yon sister over there is dead." They said that it was even so, and they bore her away. She had gone. While I was telling of heaven, she had gone there; and I remember saying that I wished that it had been my case as well as hers. It was better not, perhaps, for many reasons; but oh, I did envy her! I am always looking for the day when I shall see her again. I shall know those eyes, I am sure I shall. I shall recollect that face, if in heaven she is anything like what she was here, or bears any marks of identification. I shall not forget that inward fellowship which existed between a soul that stood with wings outspread for glory, and the poor preacher who was trying to talk of that which he knew but little of compared with her. Well, well, it will soon be my turn. Good night, poor world! It will soon be your turn, and then you shall say, "Good night." Let us meet in glory. Let us meet in glory, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm xc.

HYMNS FROM OUR "OWN HYMN BOOK"—853, 854, 846.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

LOVE'S TRANSFORMATIONS:

A COMMUNION MEDITATION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON SEPTEMBER 4TH, 1881.

"If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."—John xiv. 28.

THE loving Jesus saw a shade of sadness fall upon the faces of the twelve while he talked to them of his departure. Though he was himself to die, with his usual self-forgetfulness he only thought of them, and he desired to comfort them—to comfort them about the present sorrow of his departure. See how adroitly, how wisely, he drew upon their love for their comfort. The most common and usual source of comfort is Christ's love to us, but in this instance the most applicable and the most influential source of comfort was their love to him. He said, therefore, to them, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father." It was well and wisely spoken, for he touched them upon a point in which they were very tender; if anything could move them to comfort, it would be his appeal to their loyal love. He had appealed to that before, when he said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments"; but now, in softer, sweeter, tenderer tones, he seems to say, "If ye love me, cease your sorrow, and begin to rejoice." The Lord may give *us* drink from that same spring. It is a lower spring compared with the upper spring of his own sweet love; but he may cause it to flow most preciously, so that when we are not bold enough to drink of the higher stream, we may taste of this. If we are able to say, "Thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee," we may be cheered by that truth. "So surely as you do love me," says Christ, "you will rejoice rather than sorrow, because I said, I go unto my Father." Oh, what a blessed Master we serve, who quotes our love, not to blame us for its feebleness, but to draw a happy inference from it! So much does he desire our peace, our restfulness in his own dear self, that even the love we give to him he gives back to us, and bids us find comfort in it.

Let that stand as a preface; and now I shall deal with the text by way of making some three or four observations upon it.

I. And the first is this: IT WILL BE MUCH FOR OUR COMFORT TO TRY TO SEE THINGS IN CHRIST'S LIGHT. Notice the expression, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."

Christ had told them that he was about to die. He had said in very plain language on a former occasion, "The Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him." But now he looks at the matter in another light. His present view of it is, "I go unto the Father." Their view of it was, "Jesus is to die;" his view of it was, "I go unto my Father." Oh, how often our hearts would grow happy if we could but see things in Christ's light! Let us try to do so.

For, here observe, that *Christ sees through things.* You and I look *at* them, and we see Pilate, Herod, the judgment-seat, the scourge, the cross, the spear, the sepulchre; but Jesus looks *through* them, and he sees the Father's throne and himself exalted upon it. Could we not sometimes try to see affairs in Christ's light by looking through them? Come, brother, that present affliction which seemeth not to be joyous but grievous, nevertheless, afterward, yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness. Canst thou not look at the "afterward," and thus discern the end of the Lord? Thy present estate is tossed about and troubled, for thou art on a stormy sea; but thou art being tossed towards the port, and driven even by the storm towards thy desired haven. Canst thou not see through matters as Jesus did? Why dwell always on this life? Canst thou not see what it leads to? "The way may be rough, but it cannot be long;" and then comes an eternity of joy. Canst thou not spy out this? Thy Lord did so; for though his passage into glory was infinitely rougher than thine, though he had to swim through seas of blood, and breast the breakers of hell itself in his death-pangs, yet he looked beyond all, and said, "I go unto the Father." See things in Christ's light. See the end as well as the beginning and the middle, and thou wilt be comforted!

Do you not see, too, that the light in which Christ sees things is such that *he notices the bearing of things?* He says, in effect, "If ye could see my death as I see it—as a going unto the Father—ye would rejoice." He sees the ultimate result and bearing of things. Oh, if we could always do the same, and perceive what will come of our present sorrow, and what it tends to, and what God means to bring out of it all, then we should not so much see the fire as the pure ingot that comes forth of it! Then we should not so much see the ploughing, and the scattering of the seed to be buried beneath frost and snow, but we should hear the shouts of harvest, and see the yellow sheaves gathered into the garner. Oh, to see providences in Christ's light!

But I do not mean to dwell upon this. I only want to throw out the thought, that every troubled one may now think of his own case as Christ would think of it. If you have a sorrow, how would Jesus deal with this sorrow if it were his own? If you are just now in darkness, what would be Christ's outlook from the window of faith? What would he see as coming out of this affliction? There is no better rule for Christian conduct than, "What would Jesus do?" I was much struck when I saw that question hanging up in our Orphanage girls'

school—"What would Jesus do?" Friend, this is what you should do. What does Jesus think about trial?—for, according to the measure of your capacity, my brother, that is what you should think of it. Try this holy rule, and you will find the major part of your sorrows transformed into joys. A clear understanding of the nature of our trial would lead us to glory in tribulation. All that has to do with Jesus is joyous when seen in his light! If you understood his passion, you would see his glory; if you understood his tomb, you would see his resurrection; if you understood his death, you would see his throne.

II. Our second observation is this: OUR LOVE OUGHT TO GO TOWARDS OUR LORD'S PERSON. "If ye loved *me*, ye would rejoice." Come, my dear friends, gather up your thoughts a minute while I remind you that the chiefest love that we have should go to Jesus Christ himself: not so much to his salvation, as to himself, should our hearts fly. "If ye loved *me*, ye would rejoice." We do well to love Christ's house, and his day, and his book, and his church, and his service, and his blood, and his throne; but we must, above all these things, love his person. That is the tender point; "we love *him*," and other things in him. We love his church for his sake; his truth because it is his truth; his cross because he bore it for us; and his salvation because purchased by his blood. I counsel you to pull up the sluices of your love, and let the full tide flow towards Jesus. Love HIM.

For, first, he is the source of all benefits; therefore, in loving him you value the benefits, but you trace them to their fountain-head. Should we love the gift better than the giver? Should the wife love her jewels better than the beloved one who gave them? It must not be so. Love the very person of Jesus—the God, the man, Emmanuel, God with us. Realize him as a distinct existence. Let him stand before you now "with scars of honour in his flesh, and triumph in his eyes," as we sang just now. Love him as the source of your hope, your pardon, your life, your future glory.

Loving him we learn to prize all his gifts the more, for he that loves the giver values the smallest gift for the giver's sake. Your love to the person of Jesus will not make you think less of the benefits which he bestows, but infinitely more. Shoot at the centre of the target. Love him, and, loving him, you will value all that he gives.

Loving Jesus we have him for our own, and that is a great blessing. A man may love gold and not have it. A man may love fame and not have it. But he that loves Christ has Christ; for certainly there was never yet a hand of love stretched out to embrace him unlawfully. He is the property of all who lay hold of him with their hearts.

Love him, and then you will sympathize with him. His work will arouse your greatest interest. When his cause seems to decline, you will grieve with him; and when he wins the day, you will shout the victory with him. Love him, and you will love the souls of men. Love Jesus, and you will seek to bring sinners to him. Nothing can do you so much good, and fit you so well for his service, as to love himself. Love him, and you will love his people, for never heart did love Christ and hate his church. He that loves the Head loves the members. "Everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him." We know that we love Jesus when we love the brethren.

Love Christ, and you will have a possession which will last for ever; for other things expire, but love never fails. "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease;" but he that loves possesses a coin that is current in the skies. He shall go on to love for ever. When the sun shall be darkened, and the stars shall fall from heaven, like withered leaves, he that loves Jesus shall still go on to love, and find in that love his heaven.

Remember, if you love the Son, the Father will love you. That is a precious word of his which you will find in the sixteenth chapter of John, at the twenty-seventh verse. There is a common object of love between the believer and the Father. When you glorify Christ, the Father says "Amen" to what you do. There is no lover of the Christ equal to the Father. "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." Therefore love the Son, and yield all honour to him, even as the Father doth.

If you love him you may well do so. It is necessary—absolutely necessary—that you should love your own Lord, for I will tell you a secret thing, only to be whispered in the believing ear—you are married to him; and what is the marriage-state without love? What, then, would the church be to Christ if she loved him not? What a wretched farce this union would be if there were no love between the soul and Christ to whom it is united! You are a member of his body; shall not the hand love the Head? Shall not the foot love the Head? God forbid that we should be without love to Jesus Christ; love to his own altogether lovely self. May God the Holy Spirit work in us abundantly to love Jesus, who tenderly says, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice"!

III. My third observation is, that SOMETIMES OUR SORROWS PUT A QUESTION ON OUR LOVE. Do you not notice that it was because they were very sorrowful, not seeing things in the Master's light, that Jesus said, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice"? Let us try to-night to check the sorrow which may be in our bosoms at this hour, since it may cast an "if" upon our love to Christ.

Notice that if sorrow about the loss of an earthly thing eats into your heart, it puts an "if" upon your love to Christ. Many are the cries of woe: "Alas! I have lost my property; I have lost the old house in which my fathers lived; I have lost my situation; I have lost my dearest friend!" Is it therefore true that, because of this loss, you have no joy left? Have you lost your Saviour? I thought you called him your Best-Beloved, and you said that he was your all: is he also gone? Did I not hear you say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee"? Is that true? Oh, over-burdened heart! Oh, heavy spirit! Dost thou love Jesus? Then why disconsolate? An "if" comes up when we think of your despair.

So, too, when we too much repine under personal affliction, a question is suggested. You may be ill to-night; or you may be fearing that an illness is coming; or you may be in pain or weakness. Because you fear that consumption is upon you, your heart is very heavy. Truly, it is a sad thing to be diseased; but who sent you this? Whose will is it that it should be so? Who is the Lord of the house?

Is not the grief your Lord's will, your Saviour's will? You say you love him, and yet you will not let him have his way, and are in a pet with him, and would dispute his love in sending this affliction! Is that so, my brother? Does not that murmuring of yours put an "if" of question upon your love to his blessed person?

You say, too, that you have been trusting him, and yet you have fallen into difficulties and straits. You do not know which way to turn; and you suspect that his providence is not wise. Do you think so? If you loved him as you should, would you think so? Is there not an "if" somewhere? I do not mean an "if" about your loving him, but about your loving him as you ought. Methinks, if you loved him as he deserves, you would say, "The King can do no wrong. My King is kind, wise, loving. I yield everything into his blessed hands."

And so your sorrow is occasioned by the fear of death! You go burdened every day about death, do you? That is a poor compliment to the Well-Beloved. I thought you loved him! Love him—and not wish to see his face? It is a dark passage, is it? Oh, if the way were darker still, since he is on the other side, let us pass through it with a song. To be with him where he is—are you reluctant? Reluctant to behold his face? Reluctant to be in his bosom for ever? Is there not an "if" somewhere?

No, your grief is not about your death; it is about those that have died whom you loved. You cannot forgive God for taking away those you loved so well. Who has them, friend? Who has them? I will tell you. It is One who, when he was here, said, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." He prayed for them; he died for them; and now he has his own, and you are displeased! Do you stand fretting because Christ has his own? What! Are you pettish because what he lent you for a while he has taken back? Were not your dear ones always more his than yours? Do you love him, then, and grudge your child, your babe, to Jesus? Do you grudge your mother, your brother, your wife, your husband, to him that bought them with his blood? Oh, I say again, it puts an "if" upon your love—not on the existence of it, but on the degree of it. If you loved him, you would rejoice that he sees of the travail of his soul, and has his saints with him in glory.

IV. That brings me to the closing remark, which contains the gist of the text, and all the rest is meant to lead up to it, namely, this: that OUR LOVE TO OUR DIVINE LORD OUGHT TO BE SUCH THAT HIS EXALTATION, THOUGH IT SHOULD BE OUR LOSS, SHOULD, NEVERTHELESS, GIVE US UNFEIGNED DELIGHT. I will put this very simply before you. There is a daughter of yours in Christ, and she is fading away by consumption. She is very happy in the Lord, and full of joyful expectation. She is about to die, and you are all round the bed: you, her dear mother, stand there weeping most of all. Now, your dear girl shall give you an explanation of my text. She says, "Mother, do you not know that I shall soon be with the angels, and shall see the face of God, without fault? If you loved me, mother, you would rejoice to think that I shall be away from all this weakness and this pain. If you love me, you will be glad to think that your child shall be in glory." Your girl's sweet words shall tell you what Jesus meant. He meant, "If

you loved me very much—if you loved *me*—not merely my presence and the comforts that I bring you, and the charm with which I invest your earthly life; but if you loved *me*, you would say, 'Blessed Lord, we readily deny ourselves thy company and all the joy it brings, because it is better for thee to be gone unto the Father. It is more glorious for thee to be in heaven than here; and therefore we do rejoice in thy exaltation.'" You see how it was with those disciples. I need not enlarge upon their case. When Jesus had died and risen again, and had gone away from his disciples, he took upon himself the glory which he had laid aside. The glory which he had with God before the world was, he re-assumed at the time when he entered heaven. Then, too, as the God-Man, he was invested with a new splendour. The Father said, "Let all the angels of God worship him"; and they adored him. New songs went up from every golden street, and all heaven rang with "Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!" as Christ ascended to his throne, To the throne he ascends and there he sits, King and Priest for ever, enthroned until his enemies are made his footstool. No more the bloody sweat: no more the cruel spear: no more the dark and lonesome tomb. He is exalted above all exaltation, higher than the kings of the earth, far above all principalities and powers and every name that is named. We ought to be glad of this—exceeding glad. These disciples were bound to be glad if they loved Christ, for though they could no more enjoy his company, could not sit at the table with him, could not walk through the streets with him any more, yet it was good *for him* to be gone to his glory; and therefore they were constrained to rejoice.

I want, in conclusion, to draw one or two parallel cases which may be practically applicable to yourselves.

Suppose, beloved, that it should ever be for Christ's glory to leave you in the dark, would you not rejoice to have it so? A little while ago it was so with me. A few years ago I remember preaching to you from the text, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" and I think that if ever soul of mortal man did know the bitter meaning of that cry I did. I preached, hearing the clanking of my own fetters while I spoke to you. It was sad work. That night, ere I went home, I knew the reason. There came into the vestry a man as nearly insane as man could be. Despair hung like a cloud over his countenance; and as he took my hand, he said, "I have never met a man before that seemed to know where I am. Talk with me." I saw him the next day, and several days, and saved him, by God's help, from self-destruction. Then did I rejoice because I saw that Christ was glorified. I would lose my Master's company, dark as the day would be to me without it—lose it, ay, by the month together—if it would make him glorious in the heart of one poor downcast man, or bring a single sinner to his feet. Be willing to say the same, brethren. Love Christ, and be willing for him to give you the cold shoulder instead of the kiss of his lips, if he might the more be glorified. God bring us to reach that state of self-denial, to be willing to forego that greatest luxury of heaven, for which angels themselves do pine—the presence of the Lord, if thereby Jesus may be the better served.

Well, now, suppose that you are going to be laid aside, and afflicted, and troubled, and it should be God's intent that by this you should

become more useful and more fitted for his service. If you love him, you will rejoice at this. You will accept chastisement with thankfulness, and say, "Lay on the stripes! Multiply the pains! Only fashion me so that I can glorify thee! Make no account of anything else but this—that thou mayest be exalted in my mortal body whether I live or whether I die!"

It is possible, dear friend, that you are going to be eclipsed by one who has a brighter light than any God has yet given you. None of us like this. Somebody is coming forward who will preach better than you. That Sunday-school teacher is going to teach better than you. Somebody near you will display more grace and more gift than you. What then? If you love Jesus you will rejoice that it should be so. You recollect how Paul did. There were some who preached Christ out of contention and ill-will, and wanted to get the better of Paul, and have their names cried up above the apostles. "Ah!" says Paul, "so long as Christ is preached I do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." Well spoken, Paul! I like the valour of the soldier who helped to fill the ditch with his dead body that his captain might march to victory. Throw yourselves into oblivion that Jesus may triumph. It were a small sacrifice for all the church to die a martyr's death if Jesus were but raised one inch the higher among men. Let us exhibit the self-denying spirit which is born of love. "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father."

Suppose that it should also happen that some of you are going to be deprived of all the privileges of hearing the gospel, because you are going away to a foreign land. You are extremely sorry; but suppose that Jesus means to make use of you to advance his glory among the heathen—by naming his name where it was never known before: then you may rejoice in banishment, rejoice to deny yourselves gospel privileges, rejoice to be scattered far and wide by mount, and stream, and sea, so that you may bring forth a harvest to his glory.

Brethren, if you should be sinking lower and lower in your own esteem, be not sorry for it. If Christ is rising higher and higher in your esteem, count it all gain. Sink, O self, down to death, and the abyss. Sink, sink, till there is nothing left of thee! Go down, pride, self-conceit, self-trust, self-seeking! Go even though your going should cause despondency, so long as Christ is crowned! Sink, sink, soul, if Jesus rises! If thou canst trust him better, love him better, and admire him more, so let it be. As you come to his table, say in your hearts, "Lord, make me glad, or make me sad, so long as thou art exalted! Lord, let me have thy presence, or even let me be without it, so long as thou art exalted and extolled!"

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John xiv. (parts).

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—313, 317, 786.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

MY COMFORT IN AFFLICTION.

A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON JULY 7TH, 1881.

"This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me."—Psalm cxix. 50.

IT is almost needless for me to say that, in some respects, the same events happen unto all men alike—in the matter of afflictions it is certainly so. None of us can expect to escape trial. If you be ungodly, "many sorrows shall be to the wicked." If you be godly, "many are the afflictions of the righteous." If you walk in the ways of holiness, you shall find that there are stumbling-blocks cast in the way by the enemy. If you walk in the ways of unrighteousness, you shall be taken in snares, and held therein even unto death. There is no escaping trouble; we are born to it as the sparks fly upward. When we are born the second time, though we inherit innumerable mercies, we are certainly born to another set of troubles, for we enter upon spiritual trials, spiritual conflicts, spiritual pains, and so forth; and thus we get a double set of distresses, as well as twofold mercies. He who wrote this one hundred and nineteenth Psalm was a good man, but assuredly he was an afflicted man. Many times did David sorrow, and sorrow sorely. The man after God's own heart was one who felt God's own hand in chastisement. David was a king; and therefore it would be folly on our part to suppose that men who are wealthier and greater than we are, are more screened from affliction; it is quite the reverse. The higher up the mountain the more boisterous the winds. Depend upon it, that the middle state for which Agur prayed, "Give me neither poverty nor riches," is, upon the whole, the best. Greatness, prominence, popularity, nobility, royalty bring no relief from trial, but rather an increase of it. Nobody who consulted his own comfort would enter upon dignities attended with so much labour and sore travail. Child of God, remember that neither goodness nor greatness can deliver you from affliction. You have to face it, whatever your position in life; therefore face it with dauntless courage, and extort victory from it.

Yet, even if you do face it, you will not escape it. Even if you cry to God to help you, he will help you through the trouble, but he will

probably not turn it aside from you: he will deliver you from evil, but he may yet lead you into trial. He hath promised that he will deliver you in six troubles, and that in seven there shall no evil touch you; but he does not promise that either six or seven trials shall be kept off from you. One like unto the Son of God was with the three holy children in the fire, but he was not with them till they were in the fire—at least not visibly; and he was not so with them as either to quench the flame, or to prevent their being cast into it. "I am with thee, Israel, passing through the fire," may well describe the covenant assurance. May we realize the fire if only thus we can realize the divine presence! Gladly may we accept the furnace, if we may but find the company of the Son of God with us therein. Every child of God among you can, with the Psalmist, speak of *my* affliction. You may not be able to speak of *my* estate, *my* heritage, *my* wealth, *my* health, but you can all speak of *my* affliction. No man is a monopolist of misery. A portion of the black draught of sorrow is left for others. Of that cup we must all drink, little or much; and we must drink of it as God ordains. So far, then, one event happeneth to all.

My object at this time is to show the difference between the Christian and the worldling in his affliction. First, believers have in their affliction *a peculiar comfort:* "This is my comfort in my affliction." Secondly, that comfort comes from *a peculiar source:* "For thy word hath quickened me." And, thirdly, that peculiar comfort is valuable under very *special trials,* such as are mentioned in the context.

I. First, then, believers have their PECULIAR COMFORT under affliction. "This," says David, "is my comfort in my affliction." "*This*"—dwell on the word "*this*," *as different from the consolations of other men.* The drunkard takes his cup and he quotes Solomon, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts"; and as he quaffs his cup, he says, "*This* is my comfort in my affliction." The miser hides his gold, takes down his purse, and chinks it. Oh, the music of those golden notes! And he cries, "*This* is my comfort in my affliction." Men mostly have some comfort or other. Some have allowable comforts, though they be but of minor quality; they find comfort in the sympathy of men, in domestic kindness, in philosophic reflection, in homely content; but such comforts generally fail, always fail, when the trial becomes exceedingly severe. Now, just as the wicked man and the worldly man can say of this or that, "*This* is my comfort," the Christian comes forward, and bringing with him the Word of God brimming with rich promises, he says, "*This* is my comfort in my affliction." You put down your comfort, and I put down mine. "*This* is my comfort"—he is evidently not ashamed of it; he is evidently ready to set forth his solace in preference to all others; and while others say, I derive consolation from *this,* and I from *that,* David opens the Holy Scripture, and cheerfully exclaims, "*This* is my comfort." Can you say the same? "*This*" in opposition to everything else—this promise of God, this covenant of his grace, "*This* is my comfort."

Now read "*this*" *in another sense, as indicating that he knew what it was.* "*This* is my comfort." He can explain what it is. Many Christian people get a comfort out of God's Word, and out of believing

in Christ, and out of religious exercises, but they can hardly tell what the comfort is. A rose smells sweetly to a man who does not know the name of the rose. A rose-grower tells me, "This is the Marshal Niel." Thank you, dear sir; but I do not know who Marshal Niel is, or was, or why the flower bears his military name; but I can smell the rose all the same. So, many people cannot explain doctrines, but they enjoy them. After all, experience is better than exposition. Yet it is a splendid thing when the two go together, so that the believer can say to his friend, "Listen, I will tell you, '*This* is my comfort.'"

"I saw how happy you were, dear friend, when you were in trouble. I saw you sick the other day, and I noticed your patience. I knew you to be slandered, and I saw how calm you were. Can you tell me why you were so calm and self-contained?" It is a very happy thing if the Christian can turn round, and answer such a question fully. I like to see him ready to give a reason for the hope that is in him with meekness and fear, saying,—"*This* is my comfort in my affliction." I want you, if you have enjoyed comfort from God, to get it packed up in such a form that you can pass it on to a friend. Get it explained to your own understanding, so that you can tell others what it is, so that they may taste the consolation wherewith God has comforted you. Be ready to explain to young beginners,—"*This* is my comfort in my affliction."

Again "*this*" is used in another sense, that is, *as having the thing near at hand.* I do not like speaking of my comfort from God, and saying, *that* is my comfort, *that* is the solace which I enjoyed long ago. Oh, no, no! you need a comfort that you can press to your bosom, and say, "*This* is my comfort," *this* which I have here at this present! "*This*" is the word which indicates nearness. "*This* is my comfort." Do you enjoy it now? You were so happy once. Are you as happy now?

> "What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
> How sweet their memory still!"

Yes, that is very well, Cowper, but it would be better to sing—

> "What peaceful hours I now enjoy!
> How sweet the present hour!"

"*This* is my comfort"; I have it still with me; as my affliction is present with me, so my consolation is present with me. You have heard the classic story of the Rhodian, who said that at such and such a place he had made a jump of many yards. He bragged till a Greek, who stood by, chalked out the distance, and said, "Would you mind jumping half that length now?" So I have heard people talk of what enjoyments they once had, what delights they once had. I have heard of a man who has the roots of depravity dug out of him; and, as for sin, he has almost forgotten what it is. I would like to watch that brother when under the influence of rheumatism. I do not want him to have it long, but I should like him to have a twinge or two, that I might see whether some roots of corruption do not remain. I think that when he was tried in that way, or if not just in that way, in some other, he would find that there was a rootlet or two still in the soil. If a storm were to come on, perhaps our brave dry-land sailor might not find his anchor quite so easy to cast overboard as he now thinks it is. You smile at the talk of modern perfection, and so do I; but I am sick of it. I do not believe

in it; it is so utterly contrary to that which I have to learn every day of my own unworthiness, that I feel a contempt for it. Do have your comforts always handy; pray God that that which was a consolation years ago may be a consolation still, so that you may say, "*This* is my comfort in my affliction."

Again, I think the word "this" *is meant as pleading it in prayer.* Let me read the previous verse, "Remember the word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope." That is thy promise which thou hast made me to hope upon; Lord, fulfil it to me; for this thy promise is my comfort in my affliction, and I plead it in prayer. Suppose, brethren, you and I are enabled to take comfort out of a promise, we have in that fact a good argument to plead with God. We may say, "Lord, I have so believed this promise of thine that I have been persuaded that I had in my possession the blessing therein promised to me. And now shall I be ashamed by this my hope? Wilt thou not honour thy word, seeing thou hast caused me to rest upon it?" Is not this good pleading? "Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope, for this is already my comfort; and thou wilt have given me a false comfort, and led me into error if thy word should fail. O my Lord, since I have sucked my comfort out of the expectation of what thou art about to do, surely by this thou art pledged and bound to thy servant—that thou wilt keep thy word!" Hence the word "this" is seen to be a very comprehensive word. May the Spirit of God teach us each to say of our priceless Bible, "This is my comfort in my affliction."

We pass on to note, secondly, that this comfort comes from A PECULIAR SOURCE—"This is my comfort, *for thy Word hath quickened me.*" The comfort, then, is partly outward, coming from God's Word; but it is mainly, and pre-eminently inward, for it is God's Word experienced as to its quickening power within the soul.

First, *it is God's Word that comforts.* Why do we look anywhere else for consolation but to God's word? Oh, brothers and sisters, I am ashamed to have to say it, but we go to our neighbours, or relatives, and we cry, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O my friends!" and it ends with our crying, "Miserable comforters are ye all." We turn to the pages of our past life, and look there for comfort; but this may also fail us. Though experience is a legitimate source of comfort, yet when the sky is dark and lowering, experience is apt to minister fresh distress. If we were to go at once to God's Word, and search it till we found a promise suitable to our case, we should find relief far sooner. All cisterns dry up: only the fountain remains. Next time you are troubled, reach down the Bible. Say to thy soul: "Soul, sit thou still, and hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace unto his people." You read one promise, and you feel, "No, that hardly meets the case. Here is another; but it is made to a special character, and I am afraid I am not that character. Here, thank God, is one that just fits me, as a key fits the wards of a lock." When you find such a promise, use it at once. John Bunyan beautifully pictures a pilgrim, laid by the heels in Giant Despair's castle, and there beaten with a crabtree cudgel till one morning he puts his hand into his bosom, and cries to his brother Christian, "What a fool have I been to lie rotting in this noisome

dungeon, when all this time I have a key in my bosom which will open every door in Doubting Castle!" "Sayest thou so, my brother," says Christian, "pluck it out, and let us use it at once." This key, which is called Promise, is thrust into the first lock, and the door flies open; and then it is tried upon the next and the next, with quick result. Though the great iron gate had a rusted lock, in which the key did terribly grate and grind, yet it did open, and the prisoners were free from the durance vile of their mistrust. The Promise always has opened the gate, and every gate—ay, the gates of despair shall be opened with that key called Promise, if a man does but know how to hold it firmly, and turn it wisely, till the bolt flies back. "This is my comfort in my affliction," says the Psalmist—God's own Word. Dear friends, fly to this comfort with speed in every time of trouble; get to be familiar with God's Word, that you may do so. I have found it helpful to carry "Clarke's Precious Promises" in my pocket, so as to refer to it in the hour of trial. If you go into the market, and are likely to do a ready-money business, you always take a cheque-book with you; so carry precious promises with you, that you may plead the word which suits your case. I have turned to promises for the sick when I have been of that number, or to promises to the poor, the despondent, the weary, and such like, according to my own condition, and I have always found a Scripture fitted to my case. I do not want a promise made to the sick when I am perfectly well; I do not want balm for a broken heart when my soul is rejoicing in the Lord; but it is very handy to know where to lay your hand upon suitable words of cheer when necessity arises. Thus the external comfort of the Christian is the Word of God.

Now for the internal part of his consolation. "This is my comfort in my affliction, *for thy Word hath quickened me.*" Oh, it is not the letter, but the spirit, which is our real comfort. We look not to that Book, which consists of so much binding, and so much paper, and so much ink; but to the living Witness within the Book. The Holy Ghost embodies himself in these blessed words, and works upon our hearts, so that we are quickened by the Word. It is this which is the true comfort of the soul.

When you read the promise, and it is applied with power to you; when you read the precept, and it works with force upon your conscience; when you read any part of God's Word, and it gives life to your spirit —then it is that you get the comfort of it. I have heard of persons reading so many chapters a day, and getting through the Bible in a year, —a very admirable habit, no doubt; but it may be performed so me hanically that no good whatever may come of it. You want to pray earnestly over the Word, that it may quicken you, or otherwise it will not be a comfort to you. Let us think of what our comfort is in the time of affliction from our soul's being quickened by the Word. Comfort comes thus: God's Word has in past days quickened us. It has been a word of life from the dead. In our affliction, we therefore remember how God has brought us out of spiritual death, and made us alive, and this cheers us. If you can say, "Whatever pain I suffer, whatever grief I endure, yet I am a living child of God," then you have a well-spring of comfort. It is better to be the most afflicted child of God than to be the gayest worldling Better be God's dog

than the devil's darling. Child of God, comfort yourself with this: if God has not given me a soft bed, nor left me a whole skin, yet he has quickened me by his Word; and this is a choice favour. Thus our first quickening from spiritual death is a sunny memory.

After we are made alive we need to be quickened in duty, to be quickened in joy, to be quickened in every holy exercise; and we are happy if the Word has given us this repeated quickening. If, in looking back, dear friend, you can say, "Thy Word hath quickened me; I have had much joy in hearing thy Word; I have been made full of energy through thy Word; I have been made to run in the way of thy commandments through thy Word;" all this will be a great comfort to you. You can then plead—"O Lord, while thou mayest have denied me much of the joy that some people have, yet thou hast often quickened me! Oh, be it so again, for *this* is my comfort!" I hope I am speaking to many experienced Christians, who can say that God's Word has very frequently refreshed them when they have been in the depths of distress, and fetched them up from the gates of the grave; and if they can bear this testimony, they know what comfort there is in the quickening of the Word of God, and they will ask to feel that quickening influence again, that so they may be of good comfort.

Brothers and sisters, it is a very strange thing that when God wills to do one thing he often does another. When he wants to comfort us, what does he do? Does he comfort us? Yes, and no: he quickens us, and so he comforts us. Sometimes the roundabout way is the straight way. God does not give the comfort we ask for by a distinct act, but he quickens us, and so we obtain comfort. Here is a person very low and depressed. What does a wise doctor do? He does not give strong drink to act as a temporary fillip to his spirits, for this would end in a reaction in which the man would sink lower; but he gives him a tonic, and braces him up, and when the man is stronger, he becomes happier, and shakes off his nervousness. The Lord comforts his servants by quickening them: "This is my comfort in my affliction; for thy Word hath quickened me."

I speak to some of you who have endured long affliction, and it is a joy to see you out again to-night. Has not God's Word often quickened you in affliction? Perhaps you have been sluggish when in health, but affliction has made you feel the value of the promise, the value of the covenant blessing, and then you have cried to God for it. You may have been worried about worldly cares before, but you have been obliged to drop them in the time of affliction, and your only care has been to get nearer to Christ, and to creep into your Lord's bosom.

Sometimes in prosperity you could hardly pray; but I warrant you you prayed when you were ready to perish, and pined at death's door. Your affliction quickened your prayers. There is a man trying to write with a quill pen; it will not make anything but a thick stroke; but he takes a knife and cuts fiercely at the quill till it marks admirably. So we have to be cut with the sharp knife of affliction, for only then can the Lord make use of us. See how sharply gardeners trim their vines; they take off every shoot till the vine looks like a dry stick. There will be no grapes in the spring if there is not this cutting away in the autumn and winter. God quickens us in our afflictions through his

Word. Our sorrows are made to have a salutary action on our souls; we receive by them spiritual revival and health, and thus comfort flows in to us. It would not be wise to pray to be altogether delivered from trial, though we should like to be. It would be a pleasant thing to have a grassy path all the way to heaven, and never to find a stone in the road; but though pleasant, it might not be safe. If the way were a fine turf, cut every morning with a lawn-mower, and made as soft as velvet, I am afraid we should never get to heaven at all, for we should linger too long upon the road. Some animals' feet are not adapted for smooth places; and, brethren, you and I are of a very slippery-footed race. We slip when the roads are smooth: it is easy to go down hill, but it is not easy to do so without a stumble. John Bunyan tells us that when Christian passed through the Valley of Humiliation, the fight he had there with Apollyon was very much due to the slips he made in going down the hill which descended into the valley. Happy is he who is in the Valley of Humiliation, for "he that is down need fear no fall"; but his happiness will largely depend upon how he came down. Gently, you that are on the hill-tops of delight and prosperity. Gently, lest peradventure you slip with your feet, and mischief come of it!

Quickening is what we want; and if we get it, even if it comes to us by the sharpest tribulation, we may gladly accept it. "This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy Word hath quickened me."

III. Lastly, and very briefly, there are certain PECULIAR TRIALS of Christians in which this peculiar comfort is specially excellent.

Kindly look at the psalm, and notice, in the forty-ninth verse, that the Psalmist suffered from *hope deferred.* "Remember thy Word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope." Long waiting for the promise to be fulfilled may make the soul grow weary; and hope deferred makes the heart sick. At such a time this is to be our comfort: "Thy Word hath quickened me." I have not yet obtained that which I prayed for, but I have been quickened while I have been praying. I have not found the blessing I have been seeking; but I am sure I shall have it, for already the exercise of prayer has been of service to me: *this* is my comfort under the delay of my hope, that thy Word has already quickened me.

Notice the next verse, in which the Psalmist was suffering the great trial of *scorn.* "The proud have had me greatly in derision." Ridicule is a very sharp ordeal. When the proud are able to say something against us that stings; when they laugh, ay, and laugh greatly, and treat us like the mire in the streets, it is a severe affliction, and under it we need rich comfort. If at that time we feel, that if man's word stings, yet God's Word quickens, then we are comforted. If we are driven more to God by being scorned by men, we may very cheerfully accept their contempt, and say, "Lord, I bless thee for this persecution which makes me a partaker of Christ's sufferings." I say it becomes a comfort to us to be quickened by the Word when the ungodly are despising us.

At the fifty-third verse you will see that David was under the trouble of *living among great blasphemers* and doers of open wickedness. He says, "Horror hath taken hold upon me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law." He was horrified at their vices: he wished that he

could get away from their society, and never see or hear that which distressed him so much. But if the very sight and sound of sin drive us to pray, and force us to cry to God, the result is good, however painful the process may be. If men never swore in the streets, we should not so often be driven to cry to God to forgive their profanity. If you and I could always be shut up in a glass case, and never see sin or hear of it, it might be a bad thing for us; but if, when we are compelled to see the wickedness of men, and hear their curses and revilings, we can also feel that God's Word is quickening us, even by our horror at sin, it is good for us. We have great comfort in this peculiar species of affliction, though it is exceedingly grievous to tender-hearted, pure, and delicate minds, who dwell near to God.

Just read the fifty-forth verse, and you will see another of David's trials indicated. "Thy statutes have been my song in the house of my pilgrimage." *He had many changes;* he had all the trials of a pilgrim's life—the discomforts of journeying in places where he had no abiding city. But "*this*," he says, "has been my comfort in my affliction." Thy Word has told me of a city that hath foundations; thy Word has assured me that if I am a stranger upon earth, I am also a citizen of heaven. "Thy Word hath quickened me"; I have felt myself so strengthened by thy Word that I have been glad to feel that this is not my rest. I am glad to feel that I must be away to a better land, and so my heart has been happy, and "thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."

Lastly, in the fifty-fifth verse, you see David was *in darkness*. He says, "I have remembered thy name, O Lord, in the night, and have kept thy law." Even in the night he could derive comfort from the quickening influence which often comes to the soul from the Scriptures even when we are surrounded by darkness and sorrow. I will not go over that ground again, but certain it is that when our soul is shrouded in distress it often becomes more active and gracious than when it is basking in the sunlight of prosperity. All along then, dear friends, your comfort and mine is the Word of God, laid home by God the Holy Ghost to our hearts, quickening us to an increase of spiritual life. Do not try to flee from your troubles; do not fret under your cares; do not expect this world to bring forth roses without thorns; do not hope to prevent the upspringing of briers and thistles; but ask for quickening; ask for that quickening to come, not by new revelations nor by fanatical excitement, but by God's own Word quietly applied by his own Spirit. So shall you conquer all your troubles, and overcome your difficulties, and enter into heaven singing hallelujahs unto the Lord's right hand and holy arm which have gotten him the victory.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm cxix. 49—64.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—481, 119 (Song III.), 482.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE DREAM OF THE BARLEY CAKE.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 22ND, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

"And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host."—Judges vii. 13, 14.

THE Midianites were devastating the land of Israel. These wandering tribes purposely kept away during the times of ploughing and sowing, and allowed the helpless inhabitants to dream that they would be able to gather in a harvest; but no sooner did there come to be anything eatable by man or beast, than these Bedouin hordes came up like locusts, and devoured everything. Imagine a country like Israel, which had at one time been powerful, so greatly reduced as to be unable to keep off these desert rangers; brought so low that the cities and villages were empty, and the inhabitants were hidden in the hill-sides, in the water-courses, and in the huge caverns of the rocks. God had forsaken them for their sins, and therefore their own manhood had forsaken them, and they hid themselves from enemies, whom, in better days, they had despised.

In her extremity, the guilty nation began to cry to Jehovah her God; and the answer was not long delayed. An angel came to Gideon and announced to him that the Lord had delivered Midian into his hand, and that he should smite them as one man. Gideon was a man of great faith: his name shines among the heroes of great faith in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews; and you and I will do well if we attain to the same rank in the peerage of faith as he did. But for all that, the best of men are men at the best; and men of strong faith are often men of strong conflicts; and so it was with Gideon. This man's great faith and great weakness of faith both showed themselves in a desire for signs. Once assure him that God is with him, and Gideon has no fear, but hastens to the battle, bravest of the brave. With a handful of men, he is quite prepared to go against a host of adversaries; but he pines for a sign. Again and again he asks it. The anxious question seems to be constantly recurring to him,

"Is the Lord with us? If the Lord is with us, where are all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt?" Hence his frequent prayer is, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, shew me a sign." He began with this, and this ill beginning coloured his whole after career. I have known many persons like this son of Joash: they say, "Let me but know that God is with me, and my fear is gone"; but their repeated question is, "Is the Lord with me? Is Jesus mine, and am I his? Let me but know that I am a true believer, and I am sure that I shall not perish, for God will not forsake his own; but then, am I a believer? Have I the marks and evidences of a child of God?" Hence the practice of severe self-examination, and hence also the weakening habit of craving for tokens and feelings. How many are crying, "We see not our signs"; when they ought to say, "But we see Jesus!" How many are praying, "Shew me a token for good" when the Lord Jesus has given himself for them, and has thereby given the best token of his grace!

So it happened unto Gideon, that the Lord knowing his hunger for signs and yet knowing the sincerity of his faith, bade him, on the night of the great battle which was to rout Midian, go down as a spy into the camp with his servant, and there he should receive a token for good, which would effectually quiet all his fears.

I picture Gideon and his attendant creeping down the hill in the stillness of the night, when the camp was steeped in slumber. It was about the end of the first watch, when they were soon to change sentinels. The two brave men, with stealthy footsteps, drew near the pickets, and even passed them. From long habit they had learned to make no more sound with their footfalls than if they had been cats. As they move along they come near to a couple of men who are talking together, and they listen to their conversation. Whether they were inside the tent, lying on their beds, or whether they were sitting by the camp-fire whiling away the last half-hour of their weary watch, we do not know: but there they were, and Gideon remained breathless to hear their talk. One of them told his fellow that he had dreamed a dream, and he began the telling of it. Then the other ventured an interpretation, and Gideon must have been awe-stricken when he heard his own name mentioned, and his own success foretold. Do you not see him with streaming eyes and clasped hands silently worshipping God? His assurance overflows, and motioning to his servant, they steal away through the shadows, and quietly ascend the hill to the place where the little band of three hundred lay in hiding. They look down upon the sleeping camp, and Gideon cries, "The Lord hath delivered into your hands the hosts of Midian." Obedient to their leader they descend with their trumpets, and with torches covered over with pitchers. At a signal they break the pitchers, display the lights, sound the trumpets, and shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon." Imagining that a vast army is upon them, the tribes of the desert run for their lives, and in the darkness fall foul of one another. Midian is scattered: Israel is free.

In quiet contemplation let us now play the part of spies. With all our wits about us let us thread our way among the sleepers, and listen to this dream and the interpretation thereof.

I. The first thing that I shall bring under your observation is THE

STRIKING PROVIDENCE which must have greatly refreshed Gideon. Just as he and Phurah stealthily stole up to the tent, the Midianite was telling a dream, bearing an interpretation so appropriate to Gideon. It may appear to be a little thing; but an occurrence is none the less wonderful because it appears to be insignificant. The microscope reveals a world of marvels quite as surprising as that which is brought before us by the telescope. God is as divine in the small as in the stupendous, as glorious in the dream of a soldier as in the flight of a seraph.

Now observe, first, the providence of God *that this man should have dreamed just then*, and that he should have dreamed that particular dream. Dreamland is chaos, but the hand of the God of order is here. What strange romantic things our dreams are!—fragments of this, and broken pieces of the other, strangely joined together in absurd fashion.

> "How many monstrous forms in sleep we see,
> That neither were, nor are, nor e'er can be!"

Yet observe that God holds the brain of this sleeping Arab in his hand, and impresses it as he pleases. Dreams often come of previous thoughts; see then the providence which had taken this man's mind to the hearth and the cake-baking. The Lord prepares him when he is awake to dream aright when he is asleep. God is omnipotent in the world of mind as well as in that of matter: he rules it when men are awake, and does not lose his power when men fall asleep. The heathen ascribed dreams to their gods; we read of one, that

> "Pallas poured sweet slumbers on his soul,
> And balmy dreams, the gift of soft repose."

Thin as the air, inconstant as the wind, the stuff that dreams are made of is vanity of vanities; and yet the Lord fashions it according to his own good pleasure. The man must dream, must dream then and there, and dream that dream which should convey confidence and courage to Gideon. Oh, believe it, God is not asleep when we are asleep: God is not dreaming when we are. I admire the providence of God in this: do not you? Is it not specially well ordered that this man shall dream, and therein declare a truth as deep as any in the compass of philosophy?

Further, I cannot but admire *that this man should be moved to tell his dream to his fellow.* It is not everybody that tells his dream at night; he usually waits till the morning. We are grossly foolish sometimes, but we are not always so: and hence we do not hurry to tell such disjointed visions as that which this Arab had just seen. What was there in it? Many a time, no doubt, this son of the desert would have cried, "I have had a dream—past the wit of man to say what dream it was." But this time he cannot shake it off. It burdens him, and he must tell it to his comrade by the camp-fire. Look you into the face of Gideon as he catches every syllable. Now, if this dream-telling had been arranged by military authority, and if it had been part of a programme that Gideon should be present at the nick of time to hear it, there would have been a failure somehow or other. If the man had known that he had a listener, he might not have been punctual with his narrative; but he did *not* know a word about being overheard, and yet he was punctual to the tick of a clock. God ruleth men's idle tongues

as well as their dreaming brains, and he can make a talkative soldier in the camp say just as much and just as little as will subserve the purposes of wisdom.

It is remarkable *that the man should tell his dream just when Gideon and Phurah had come near.* Just think a minute of the many chances against such a thing. We are on the side of the hill, and we glide down among the trees and the great rocks till we are nearly in the grass lands in the valley. Here lie the Midianites in their long lines of black tents, and the hush of deep slumber is over all, save where a few maintain a sleepy watch. Why does Gideon go to that particular part of the camp? Going there, why does he happen to drop on this particular spot where two men are talking? If he was spying out the camp, he would naturally wander along where there was most quiet, in order that he might not be discovered; for if the warriors had suddenly started up and snatched their spears these two men would have had small chance of life. It was singular that out of tents so countless Gideon should alight upon the very one in which were the two wakeful sentinels, and that he should come just as they were talking to one another about Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel. Considering that there were fifty thousand other things that they might have talked of, and considering that there were fifty thousand other persons upon whom Gideon might have lighted, there were so many chances against Gideon's hearing that singular talk, that I do not hesitate to say, this is the finger of God. If this were but one instance of the accuracy of providence it might not so much surprise us; but, history bristles with these instances: I mean not only public history, but our own private lives. Men sometimes make delicate machines where everything depends upon the touching of a certain pin at a certain instant, and their machinery is so arranged that nothing fails. Now, our God has so arranged the whole history of men, and angels, and the regions of the dead, that each event occurs at the right moment so as to effect another event, and that other event brings forth a third, and all things work together for good.

I think if I had been Gideon I should have said to myself, "I do not so much rejoice in what this dreamer saith as I do in the fact that he has told his dream at the moment when I was lurking near him: I see the hand of the Lord in this, and I am strengthened by the sight. Verily, I perceive that the Lord worketh all things with unfailing wisdom, and faileth not in his designs. He that has ordered this matter can order all things else." O child of God, when you are troubled it is because you fancy that you are alone; but you are not alone; the Eternal Worker is with you. Listen, and you will hear the revolution of those matchless wheels which are for ever turning according to the will of the Lord. These wheels are high and dreadful, but they move with fixed and steady motion, and they are all "full of eyes roundabout." Their course is no blind track of a car of Juggernaut, but the eyes see, the eyes look towards their end, the eyes look upon all that comes within the circuit of the wheels. Oh for a little heavenly eyesalve to touch our eyes that we may perceive the presence of the Lord in all things! Then shall we see the mountain to be full of horses of fire and chariots of fire round about the prophets of the Lord. The

stars in their courses are fighting for the cause of God. Our allies are everywhere. God will summon them at the right moment.

II. But now, secondly, I want to say something to you about THE COMFORTABLE TRIFLE which Gideon had thus met with. It was a dream, and therefore a trifle, or a nothing, and yet he took comfort from it. He was solaced by a dream, a gipsy's dream, and a poor dream at that. He took heart from an odd story of a barley bannock which overturned a tent. It is a very curious thing that some of God's servants do draw a very great deal of consolation from comparatively trivial things. We are all the creatures of sentiment as well as of reason, and hence we are often strongly affected by little things. Gideon is cheered by a dream of a barley cake. When Robert Bruce had been frequently beaten in battle, he despaired of winning the crown of Scotland; but when he lay hidden in the loft among the hay and straw, he saw a spider trying to complete her web after he had broken the thread many times. As he saw the insect begin again, and yet again, until she had completed her net for the taking of her prey, he said to himself, "If this spider perseveres and conquers, so will I persevere, and succeed." There might not be any real connection between a spider and an aspirant to a throne; but the brave heart made a connection, and thereby the man was cheered. If you and I will but look about us, although the adversaries of God are as many as grasshoppers, yet we shall find consolation. I hear the birds sing, "Be of good cheer," and the leafless trees bid us trust in God and live on, though all visible signs of life be withered. If a dream was sufficient to encourage Gideon, an every-day fact in nature may equally well serve the same purpose to us.

But what a pity it is that we should need such little bits of things to cheer us up, when we have matters of far surer import to make us glad! Gideon had already received, by God's own angel, the word, "Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." Was not this enough for him? Whence is it that a boy's dream comforts him more than God's own word. O child of God, how you degrade yourself and your Master's word, when you set so much store by a small token! Thy Lord's promise—is that little in thine eyes? What surer pledge of love dost thou desire than the blood of Jesus spilt for thee? When Jesus saith, "Verily, verily, I say unto you," what more can you require? Is not the word of the Lord absolute truth? What seal dost thou want to the handwriting of God? The Lord may grant us further tokens for good, but we ought not to require them.

I have said that our gracious God does condescendingly grant us even trifles, when he sees that they will cheer us, and this, I think, calls for adoring gratitude, and also for practical use of this comfort. God grant us grace to do great things, as the result of that which to others may seem a trifle. Let us not make a sluggard's bed out of our tokens; but let us hasten to the fight as Gideon did. If thou hast received a gleam of comfort, hasten to the conflict before the clouds return; go to thy consecrated labour before thou hast lost the fervour of thy spirit. May the Holy Ghost lead thee so to do.

III. I have been brief upon that point, because I want you to notice, thirdly, THE CHEERING DISCOVERY. Gideon had noticed a striking

providence, he had received a comfortable trifle, but he also made a very cheering discovery; which discovery was, that the enemy dreamed of disaster. You and I sometimes think about the hosts of evil, and we fear we shall never overcome them, because they are so strong, and so secure. Hearken: we over-estimate them. The powers of darkness are not so strong as they seem to be. The subtlest infidels and heretics are only men. What is more, they are bad men; and bad men at bottom are weak men. You fret because in this war you are not angels: be comforted to think that the adversaries of the truth are men also. You sometimes grow doubtful; and so do they. You half despair of victory; and so do they. You are at times hard put to it; so are they. You sometimes dream of disaster; so do they. It is natural to men to fear, and doubly natural to bad men. It must have been a great comfort to Gideon to think that the Midianites dreamed about him, and that their dreams were full of terror to themselves. He did not think much of himself; he reckoned himself to be the least of all his father's house, and that his father's house was little in Israel; but the foes of Israel had taken another gauge of Gideon—they had evidently the notion that he was a great man, whom God might use to smite them; and they were afraid of him. He that interpreted the dream made use of the name of "Gideon, the son of Joash," evidently knowing a great deal more about Gideon than Gideon might have expected. "This," said the soldier, "is the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." Notice how his words tallied with those which the Lord had spoken to Gideon. The enemy had begun to dream, and to be afraid of him who now stood listening to their talk. A dread from the Lord had come upon them. Let us say to ourselves, "Why should we be afraid of sinners? they are afraid of us." A Christian man, the other day, was afraid to speak about his Lord to one whom he met. It cost him a deal of trouble to screw his courage up to speak to a sceptic; but when he had spoken, he found that the sceptic had all along been afraid that he would be spoken to. It is a pity when we tremble before those who are trembling because of us. By want of faith in God we make our enemies greater than they are.

Behold the host of doubters, and heretics, and revilers, who, at the present time, have come up into the inheritance of Israel, hungry from their deserts of rationalism and atheism! They are eating up all the corn of the land. They cast a doubt upon all the verities of our faith. But we need not fear them; for if we heard their secret counsels, we should perceive that they are afraid of us. Their loud blusterings, and their constant sneers, are the index of real fear. Those who preach the cross of our Lord Jesus are the terror of modern thinkers. In their heart of hearts they dread the preaching of the old-fashioned gospel, and they hate what they dread. On their beds they dream of the coming of some evangelist into their neighbourhood. What the name of Richard was to the Saracens, that is the name of Moody to these boastful intellects. They wish they could stop those Calvinistic fellows and those evangelical old fogies. Brethren, so long as the plain gospel is preached in England there will always be hope that these brigands will yet be scattered, and the church be rid of their intrusion.

Ratioinalism, Socinianism, Ritualism, and Universalism will soon take to their legs, if the clear, decided cry of "the Sword of the Lord and of Gideon" be once more heard.

There is nothing of which a child of God need be afraid either on the earth or under it. I do not believe that in the lowest depths of hell we should hear or see anything that need make a believer in the Lord Jesus to be afraid. On the contrary, tidings of what the Lord has wrought have made the enemy to tremble. Goodness wears in her innocence a breastplate of courage, but sin gendereth to cowardice. Those who follow after falsehood have a secret monitor within, which tells them that theirs is a weak cause, and that truth must and will prevail over them. Let them alone; the beating of their own hearts will scare them. The Lord liveth, and while he liveth let no man that trusteth in his word suffer his heart to fail him; for the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. Our adversaries are neither so wise, nor so brave, nor so influential as we think them to be. Only have courage, and rely upon God, and you will overcome them. David, thou needest not fear the giant because of his size; the vastness of his shape will only make him an easier target for thy smooth stone. His very bulk is his weakness; it were hard to miss so huge a carcase. Be not afraid, but run to meet him; the Lord hath delivered him into thine hand. Why should the servants of the Lord speak doubtfully when their God pledges his honour that he will aid them? Let us change our manner of speech, and say with the Psalmist, "Ascribe ye strength unto God: his excellency is over Israel. Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered; let them also that hate him flee before him." We have received a kingdom which cannot be moved. We have believed the faith once delivered unto the saints, and we will display it as a banner because of the truth. Yet shall this song be sung in our habitations—"The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it. Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil."

IV. Lastly, and most important of all, let us think for a little of THE DREAM ITSELF AND OF ITS INTERPRETATION.

The Midianite in his dream saw a barley cake. Barley cakes were not much valued as food in those days, any more than now. People ate barley when they could not get wheat; but they would need to be driven to such food by poverty, or famine. Barley-meal was rather food for dogs or cattle than for men; and therefore the barley cake would be the emblem of a thing despised. A barley cake was generally made upon the hearth. A hole was made in the ground, and paved with stones; in this a fire was made, and when the stones were hot, a thin layer of barley-meal was laid upon them, covered over with the ashes, and thus quickly and roughly baked. The cake itself was a mere biscuit. You must not interpret the dream as having in it a large quartern loaf of barley bread, tumbling down the hill and smashing up the tent with its own weight. No, it was only a cake, that is to say, a biscuit, of much the same form and thinness as we see in the Passover cakes of the Jews. It may have been a long piece of thin crust, and it was seen in the dream moving onward and waving in the air something like a sword. It came rolling and waving down the hill till it came crash against the

pavilion of the prince of Midian, and turned the tent completely over, so that it lay in ruins. Perhaps driven by a tremendous wind, this flake of barley-bread cut like a razor through the chief pole of the pavilion, and over went the royal tent. That was his vision: an odd, strange dream enough. His fellow answered, "The dream means mischief for our people. One of those barley-cake-eaters from the hills will be upon us before long. That man Gideon, whom we have heard of lately, may fall upon us on a sudden, and break down our power." That was the interpretation: the barley biscuit the ruin of the pavilion.

Now, what we have to learn from it is just this, *God can work by any means.* He can never be short of instruments. For his battles he can find weapons on the hearth, weapons in the kneading-trough, weapons in the poor man's basket. Omnipotence has servants everywhere. For the defence of his cause God can enlist all the forces of nature, all the elements of society, all the powers that be. His kingdom cannot fail, since the Lord can defend it even by the cakes which are baking upon the coals. Gideon, who threshes corn to-day, will thresh the Lord's enemies to-morrow. Preachers of the word are being trained everywhere.

God can work by the feeblest means. He can use a cake which a child can crumble to smite Midian, and subdue its terrible power. Alas, sirs! we often consider the means to be used, and forget to go onward to him who will use them. We often stop at the means, and begin to calculate their natural force, and thus we miss our mark. The point is to get beyond the instruments, to the God who uses the instruments. I think I have heard that a tallow candle fired from a rifle will go through a door: the penetrating power is not in the candle, but in the force impelling it. So in this case, it was not the barley-biscuit, but the almighty impulse which urged it forward, and made it upset the pavilion. We are nothing; but God with us is everything. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength."

By using weak means our Lord gets to himself all the glory, and hides pride from men. The Lord had said to Gideon in the early part of this chapter, "The people are yet too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me." Their oppression was a punishment for sin, and their deliverance must be an act of mercy. They must be made to see the Lord's hand, and they cannot see it more clearly than by being delivered by feeble means. Out of jealousy for his own glory it often pleases God to set aside likely means and use those which we looked not for. Now I know how it is to-day: men think that if the world is to be converted it must be done by learned men, men of noble family, or at least of eminent talent. But is this the Lord's usual way? Is there anything in the Acts of the Apostles, or in the life of Christ, that should lead us to look to human wisdom, or talent, or prestige? Does not everything look in the contrary direction? The lake of Galilee was Christ's apostolic College. Has not God always acted upon his own declaration that he hath hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hath revealed them unto babes? Is it not still true that the Lord hath chosen the weak things of the

world to confound the things which are mighty ; and base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are ? Are we not on the wrong track altogether when we look to men, and means, and measures, instead of considering the right hand of the Most High ? Brethren, let us never forget that out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hath the Lord ordained strength because of his enemies, that he might still the enemy and the avenger.

The Lord employs feeble means, that so he may have an opening for you and for me. If he used only the great, the wise, the strong, we should have to lie in the corner. Then might the men of one talent be excused for hiding it. But now the least among us may through God's grace aspire to usefulness. Brothers, let not your weakness keep you back from the Lord's work : you are at least as strong as barley cakes. I find that the original text suggests a noise, such as might be made by chestnuts or corn when roasting in the fire. The dreamer marked that it was a noisy cake which tumbled into the host of Midian. More noise than force, one would say. It was like a coal which flies out of the fire, makes a little explosion, and is never more heard of. Thus have many of God's most useful servants been spoken of at the first. They were nine-day wonders, mere flashes in the pan, much ado about nothing, and so forth. And yet the Lord smites his enemies by their feeble means. My brother, perhaps you have begun to make a little stir by faithfully preaching the gospel, and this has opened the mouths of the adversaries, who are indignant that such a nobody as you should be useful. "Why, there is nothing in the fellow : it is sheer impudence for him to suppose that he has any right to speak." Never mind. Go on with your work for the Lord. Cease not because you are of such small account, for by such as you are God is pleased to work.

Never are his adversaries so shamefully beaten as when the Lord uses feeble instrumentality. The Lord smote the hosts of Jabin by the hand of a woman, and the hosts of Philistia by the hand of Shamgar the ploughman. It was to their everlasting reproach that the Lord put his foes to the rout with pitchers and trumpets in the hand of the little band who followed the thresher of Abiezer. The Lord will tread Satan under our feet shortly, even under *our* feet, who are less than the least of all saints.

Note, next, *God uses unexpected means.* If I wanted to upset a tent I certainly should not try to overturn it by a barley cake. If I had to cannonade an encampment I should not bombard it with biscuits. Yet how wonderfully God hath wrought by the very persons whom we should have passed over without a thought. O Paganism, thy gigantic force and energy, with Cæsar at their head, shall be vanquished by fishermen from the sea of Galilee ! God willed it so, and so it was done. Rome Papal met as signal a downfall from reformers rude of speech, and poor in estate. Expect the unexpected. Thus the Lord works to call men's attention to what he does. If he doeth what men commonly reckon upon, they take no notice of his doings, however splendid they may be in themselves ; but if he steppeth aside and doeth that which none could have looked for, then is their attention arrested, and they consider that the hand of the Lord is in it. Then also they admire and

feel somewhat of awe of him. For the tent to fall seems nothing, but for the tent to fall by being smitten with a barley cake is something to be marvelled at. For souls to be saved is in itself remarkable; but for them to be saved by some simple child-like evangelist who can scarcely speak grammatically, this is the talk of the town. For the Lord to call out a thief or a blasphemer and speak by his lips, is a thing to make men feel the greatness of God. Then they cry, "How unsearchable are his ways!" For an error to be blasted and dried up is a blessed thing; and yet it is all the more miraculous when this is done, not by reasoning, nor by eloquent argument, but by the simple declaration of Gospel truth. O sirs, we never know what the Lord will do next. He can raise up defenders of the faith from the stones of the river. I despair not for the grand old cause. Nay, I hope against hope. Driven back as we may be, I see the very dust breeding warriors, and the grass of the field hardening into spears. Courage! Courage! Stand still, and see the salvation of God!

But the dream hath more in it than this: *God useth despised means.* This man Gideon is likened to a cake, and then only to a barley-cake; but the Lord styles him "a mighty man of valour." God loves to take men whom others despise, and use them for his glorious ends. "He is a fool," they say, "an uneducated man, one of the very lowest class of minds. He has no taste, no culture, no thought. He is not a person of the advanced school." My dear brother, I hope no one among you will be influenced by this kind of silly talk. The "mashers" in our churches talk in this fashion; but who cares for their proud nonsense? It is time that men who despise others should be themselves despised, and be made to know that they are so. Those who boast their intellect are of small account with God. The whole tenor of this inspired Book is that way; it speaks kindly of things that are despised, but it has no word of reverence for the boastful and pretentious. Therefore, ye despised ones, let the proud unbelievers laugh at you, and sing concerning you their song of a barley cake; but do you in patience possess your souls, and go on in the service of your Lord. They think to render you contemptible; but the scorn shall return upon the scorners. You shall yet by the Lord's strength have such force and vigour put into you, that you shall put to flight the armies of the aliens. Say you with Paul, "When I am weak, then am I strong." "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree."

But, then, *God ever uses effectual means.* This cake of barley-bread came unto a tent and smote it, that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. The Lord never does his work by halves. Even if he works by barley-cakes, he makes a clean overthrow of his enemy. A cannon-ball could not have done its work better than did this barley-cake. Friend, if the Lord uses thee for his own purpose, he will do his work by thee as effectually and surely as if he had selected the best possible worker. He lifts our weakness out of itself, and elevates it to a level of power and efficacy little dreamed of by us. Wherefore, be not afraid, ye servants of God, but commit yourselves into the hands of him who, out of weakness, can bring forth strength.

I have done when I have made an application of all this to certain practical purposes. Brethren, do you not think that this smiting of the tent of Midian by the barley cake, and afterwards the actual overthrow of the Midianite hordes by the breaking of the pitchers, the blazing of the torches, and the blowing of the trumpets, all tends to comfort us as to those powers of evil which now cover the world? I am appalled sometimes as I think of the power of the enemy, both in the matter of impurity and falsehood. At this present moment you seem as if you could do nothing: you cannot get in to strike a blow. Sin and error have so much the upper hand that we know not how to strike them. The two great parties in England, the Puritan and the Cavalier, take turn about, and just now the Cavalier rules most powerfully. At one time sound doctrine and holy practice had sway; but in these days loose teaching and loose living are to the fore. But our duty clearly lies in sticking to the word of the Lord and the gospel of our fathers. God forbid that we should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. By this sign we shall conquer yet. The impurity of the age will never be cleansed except by the prevalence of the gospel; and the infidelity of the period will never die before any assault but that of the pure truth of the living Lord. We must tell of pardon bought with blood, of free forgiveness according to the riches of divine grace, and of eternal power changing fallen human nature, and making men new creatures in Christ Jesus. They call this a worn-out doctrine: let us put its power to the test on the largest scale, and we shall see that it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. As for me, I shall preach the gospel of the grace of God, and that only, even if I be left alone. The hosts of Israel are melting away, and they will melt much more. As in Gideon's day, out of the whole host twenty and two thousand have gone altogether away from true allegiance to the cause, and many more have no stomach for the fight. Let them go. The thousands and the hundreds. Let the thirty thousand who came at the trumpet-call decrease to the three hundred men that lap in haste as a dog lappeth, because they are eager for the fray. When we are thinned out, and made to see how few we are, we shall be hurled upon the foe with a power not our own. Our weapon is the torch of the old gospel, flaming forth through the breaking of our earthen vessels. To this we add the trumpet sound of an earnest voice. Ours is the midnight cry, "Behold he cometh!" We cannot get victory by any might or skill of ours, and yet in the end the foe shall be defeated, and the Lord alone shall be exalted. Were things worse than they are, we would still cry, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon," and stand each man in his place till the Lord appeared in strength.

Another lesson would I draw from the text as to our inward conflicts. Dear friend, you are feeling in your heart the great power of sin. The Midianites are encamped in your soul; in the little valley of Esdrelon which lies within your bosom, there are countless evils, and these, like the locusts, eat up every growing thing, and cause comfort, and strength, and joy, to cease from your experience. You sigh because of these invaders. I counsel you to try what faith can do. Your own earnest efforts appear to make you worse; try faith. Neither tears,

nor prayers, nor vows, nor self-denials, have dislodged the foe; try the barley cake of faith. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. In him you are saved; in him you have power to become a child of God. Believe this and rejoice. Poor sinner! try faith. Poor backslider! try faith. Poor desponding heir of heaven! try faith. This barley cake of faith will smite the power of sin and break the dominion of doubt, and bring you victory. Remember that ancient Scripture, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Make bold to believe. Say at once,

"I do believe, I will believe,
That Jesus died for me."

This seems a very poor means of getting the victory, as poor as the barley cake baked on the coals; but God has chosen it, and he will bless it, and it will overthrow the throne of Satan within your heart, and work in you holiness and peace.

Once again, still in the same vein: let us, dear friends, try continually the power of prayer for the success of the gospel, and the winning of men's souls. Prayer will do anything—will do everything. It fills the valleys and levels the mountains. By its power men are raised from the door of hell to the gate of heaven. What is to become of London? What is to become of heathen nations? I listen to a number of schemes, very visionary, and very hard to work out. But I put these aside. There remaineth to believers but one scheme: our Lord hath said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." This, therefore, we must do, and at the same time we must cry mightily unto God by prayer that his Holy Spirit may attend the proclamation of the Word. Let us more and more prove the power of prayer, resting assured that the Lord is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think. Let each man stand with the flaming torch of truth in his hand, and the trumpet of the gospel at his lips, and so let us compass the army of the aliens. This is our war cry—Christ and him crucified! God forbid that we should know anything else among men, but the death, the blood, the resurrection, the reign, the coming, the glory of Christ. Let us not lose faith in our calling, nor in our God; but rest assured that the Lord reigneth and his cause must triumph. Where sin abounded grace doth much abound. We shall see better and brighter days than these. Grant it, O Lord, for thy Son's sake. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Judges vi. 1—21, 36—40; vii. 7—15.

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Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

A DISCOURSE UPON TRUE BLESSEDNESS HERE AND HEREAFTER.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 13TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON LORD'S-DAY EVENING, AUGUST 2ND, 1885.

"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."—James i. 12.

THE text is a Beatitude. It begins with BLESSED. We should all like to be blessed. What a more than golden word that "blessed" is! It begins the Psalms of David: there is sweetest poetry in it. It begins the sermon of the Son of David; it is the end of all holy teaching. "Happiness" is the earthly word; "blessedness" is the heavenly one. Happiness may prove to be a superficial appearance; but blessedness is deep as the abyss. Happiness ripples like a flowing brook; but blessedness is a springing well. Happiness may be wholly human; but blessedness hath the divine element in it. Happiness is transient; blessedness is eternal. Happiness may lie in our own conception of things; blessedness is God's verdict, God's truthful statement of a man's condition. Happiness may prove but tinsel; blessedness is solid gold. Oh, to be blessed! Blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth! Where are these blessed men? There are such still upon the earth, for the text saith, "Blessed is the man:" it speaks not of a phantom, but of a man: it treats not of an ideal man, but of one who is tried and made to endure temptation. I hear in this verse the echo of the music of many a psalm which was chanted by the saints hundreds of years before. James took pen in hand concerning blessed men, and of the like persons David long before had sung, as of men well known to him. There are such persons as blessed men, or the eminently practical James would not have written concerning them. It is true the curse has fallen on the world, and man is born to endure toil and suffering in tilling a thorn-bearing earth, and earning his bread with the sweat of his face; but for all that, there are blessed men—men so blessed that the wilderness and the solitary place are glad for them, and by their presence the desert is made to rejoice and blossom as the rose.

Where are these blessed men? Can we be of their number? Is there any way by which *we* can enter their ranks and become members of their glorious peerage? Blessed men! Henceforth we will not rest until we are initiated into this sacred fellowship.

Great mistakes are made as to the persons who are happy and blessed. Some suppose that the wealthy must be blessed; but if their lives were written, it could be proved to a demonstration that some of those who have had the largest possessions have had the very least of blessedness, especially when those possessions have brought with them the curses of the oppressed and the wailings of the down-trodden. It must be an awful thing to have tons of cankered gold and silver pressing upon the soul, and burying the true life beneath the accursed load. Ay, and when wealth comes justly it often brings such care, such burdensomeness with it, that it is well described in the Scriptures as a load of thick clay. In addition, there may be such a lack of power to enjoy it, that the man may be rather cursed than blessed by his possessions. Well may we pity the man who has pictures but no sight, music but no ear, meat but no appetite, estates but no health wherewith to enjoy them. Are there not thousands of such? Certainly they are not blessed by their fortunes. Moreover, riches are uncertain things: like the hoarfrost of the morning, they are gone when the sun is up. Do but clap your hands, and the birds that cover the fields fly away, and so do riches: they "take to themselves wings and fly away." How should such fleeting things bring blessedness to the fields on which they light for so short an hour! No, look not in gold mines for blessedness, for it gleams not among the nuggets. It cannot be gotten for all the treasures of the miser, or the wealth of nations.

But, surely, it is to be found in positions of eminence and power. These are greatly coveted, and men will sell their souls to win them; but I suppose from what I have read of history that if I were to select the most unhappy set of men beneath the vault of heaven one would only have to select statesmen, emperors, and kings. Surely on the day of his installation the great man may well say, "Farewell peace!" I should not certainly search among the lofty glaciers of yonder Alps to find the flowers of happiness. All is chill and cold and tempestuous in the high places of the earth; and if one had the choice of such a place, he might accept it out of a self-denying wish to do good, but otherwise he were unwise to have it as a gift. Not the high but the holy are blessed; not those who sit with the great, but those who serve with the good are marked out of the Lord as blessed.

Nobler natures feel no greed for gold, and pine for no distinction of rank; but they count those blessed who know, and are stored with wisdom. Surely to pry into the secrets of nature, and read the pages of philosophy must be pleasure of a lofty kind. Hence ambitious youth burneth the midnight oil, and the oil from the marrow of life as well, hoping that in search and study the mystery of blessedness will be discovered. But is it so? Doth he that increaseth knowledge increase joy? Doth he not the rather add to his sorrow? If knowledge were bliss the devil would be in heaven. Should we possess the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, yet these would profit us nothing in the trade of happiness. Telescopes, microscopes,

air-pumps, and calculating machines are not the instruments of that alchemy which brings happiness out of all conditions. In another school than that of Plato we must learn in whatsoever state we are therewith to be content. Blessedness is not the book-worm of the library, but a spirit which descends from above.

But some think that surely blessedness may be had by a combination of dignity and wisdom and riches. Put these together, and a man might surely then be blessed. And yet it does not seem to be so. I should think that no mortal that ever lived had finer opportunities than Solomon. He began with a blessed heritage from a father who was a man after God's own heart. He gathered riches like the sand of the sea, and he had a capacious mind like the sea itself. None of that age could be thought of as his rivals, and perhaps none since have altogether equalled this many-sided man. He denied himself no luxury: he abstained from no pleasure. He tried everything that could be tried, both serious and comic. There was nothing from which he stayed his hand. He cast everything into the crucible, and he brought out of it, not gold, but ashes. "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity." This is the conclusion of Solomon's life as well as of Solomon's discourse. No, you cannot find blessedness on a throne nor in making many books, nor in seeking out many inventions, nor in enjoying all luxuries. These things all cry, "It is not in me." Blessedness is a thing which is not discoverable beneath the moon, apart from him who sits above this world and looks down, and by his Spirit influences human minds after the best things. Apart from him you may have health and wealth and talent and eminence and power and dignity, and yet be written down amongst the most wretched of mankind. If you want blessedness, hear him speak who knows. That is, hear the Holy Ghost speak by the mouth of his servant James: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

The subject for to-night shall be *the blessed man in his worldly state*, and, secondly, *the blessed man in the world to come.*

I. We are going to find him out first in this present world, and consider him in this present life. Let us behold THE BLESSED IN THIS LIFE. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

It does seem very startling at first sight that the blessed man should be described in this way. Notice, it does not say, "Blessed is the man that is tempted," nor "Blessed is the man that is beset by temptation." No. "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation.*" That is to say, the man who bears up under it, survives it, is not led aside by it, but endures it as gold endures the fire.

But observe, first, that it does not say, "Blessed is the man who is never tempted." I am sure that word has often been ready upon our lips when we have been in the sharp fire of the enemy. We have said, "Blessed is that man who is never tried, never afflicted, never tempted. Oh when shall we get to the place where there shall be none of these trials and temptations?" But James says not, "Blessed is the man who is not tempted," but, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

Look, sirs, suppose we are professing Christians to-night, and, as such, think that we have genuine faith in Christ—that we have a bright hope of heaven—that we have a pure and fervent love to God—that

we have in ourselves received the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, and that we are certainly the children of God: this is a flattering belief, and tends greatly to our present comfort; but suppose none of these have been tried. It would be a very presumptuous and unwise thing for us to pronounce ourselves blessed; for when such trial shall come—and come it will to us all in life or in death—suppose all our happy signs and cheering tokens should fail us. We cannot say that we are blessed till our graces have been tried and proved; and when they have been tried and proved, and we have endured the test in God's great proof-house, then are we blessed, but not till then. Here is a man who has received a file of what looks to be bank-notes, and he thinks he is very rich. Have you tried to pass one of them? Have you taken one of them to a bank? No, poor fool! He does not wish to have his fine fortune tried; he is angry when you suggest a doubt. And yet his wealth is mere fiction; those flimsy papers are bank-notes of the Bank of Elegance; and if he were to attempt to pass them, he might rather be suspected to be a thief, than be judged to be a rich man. Much faith in this world is no better than that; and he is not blessed, but blinded, that possesses it. He is blessed who has tried his faith, who has gone to God with a promise, and received an answer to his prayer. He is blessed who has had his faith tried, who, having been put into the furnace, has by that faith in God been made to walk safely amid the flaming coals, and to come out unharmed. Untried faith is questionable faith. Is it faith at all? Was there ever in this world a believer altogether without trouble, or a grain of faith which had undergone no trial?

Blessed, then, is the man that *endureth trial.* I would not like to have everything about me untried. You would hardly like to sleep in a bed concerning which you were not sure that it might not be damp and cause your death. One would not like to buy a house that he had never seen, or a yoke of oxen that he had never tried, or even a cheese which he had not tasted. One feels like David when he put on Saul's armour. Though it was royal armour, he did not like it any the better for that, for he had never seen the go of it, nor tried how far he could move and fight in it. It fitted him a great deal too much, and he could hardly find himself within its ample scope. At last he made up his mind to have none of it, he must have it off, and therefore he cried, "I cannot go with these, for I have not proved them." He had well tried that bit of hide which made his sling: he knew what he could do with that and a smooth stone; and therefore he felt at ease with tried weapons; but as for Saul's armour—well, he had not tried it. If your religion has never been tested, you can hardly be described as "blessed." "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

It may seem a fine thing to have a religion that you lay aside on Monday morning after having carefully brushed it; it may seem correct and proper to put your Sunday religion into a box, with a sprig of lavender, or something to keep away the moth. But it is an awful farce. Your godliness will come out again on Saturday evening with your clean linen, and you will be very gracious on Sunday morning when you have put on your suit and your sanctity, your hat and your heavenly-mindedness. As for the week—well, you do not want to wear your religion out too soon, and therefore you do not use it on a Monday.

You have other manners for Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, and Saturday. This is a wretched comedy. O sirs, the sooner you burn such religion the better! You need to have a religion which is tested every day in the week, and which stands you in good stead because it can endure the test. You are blessed if you have a religion which God gives, which God tries, which God sustains, which God accepts. As an uncultivated garden is no garden, so untried godliness is no godliness. A faith that will not bear strain and test is no faith. A love that cannot endure a temptation is no love to God at all. See, then, he is not blessed who is screened from temptation, but he is blessed whose faith, and hope, and love, and every grace will bear the trial.

In these times, we need not wish for more temptations, for they are all around us. Men who live in London need not go across the street to meet the devil. The very atmosphere of a great city is close and hot with the reek of sin. As flies in summer, so will temptations torment you, go where you may. Men of business, you need not ask for temptations; they are thick in every trade; they multiply like gnats. They swarm in the factory, the counting-house, the exchange, and the shop. The Christian man in public need not sigh for temptations; they will not be ashamed to solicit him in the open streets. This age tests the backbone of every Christian. A man had need be a man at such an hour as this. We must not be dwarfs nor spiritual consumptives now. We have come into the very thick of the fight, and woe to that man who cannot endure temptation; but blessed is the man who can bear it even to the end. Dear sister in Christ, you think yourself very patient. Have you any pain? Have you endured the loss of children or husband? If not, make not too sure of your patience. But blessed are they whose patience has endured the open grave, the constant gnawing at the heart, the bitterness of poverty, and the agony of an every-day struggle for bread. The men who bear affliction in a gracious manner, these are the blessed people, for they have a patience that has been tested, a faith that has passed the ordeal, a love that has been more than a conqueror in trial. These according to our text are the blessed people. The Holy Ghost pronounces them such.

And they are blessed among other things for this reason: because *they have endured temptation through their love to God.* Read the text again, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised—" to them that endure temptation? No, "to them that love him." So that those who endure temptation rightly, endure it because they love God. They say to themselves, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" They cannot fall into sin because it would grieve him who loves them so well, and whom they love with all their hearts. To abstain from sin for any reason is, so far, good; but yet, you may abstain from sin from a motive which will lend no virtue to your abstinence. Some abstain from sin from fear of men, or from hope of gain: as the thief is honest when he sees the policeman, and the beggar becomes pious when a dole is to be had at church. One sin will often kill another sin, as the miser shuns profligacy because he is too mean to spend his money riotously. But to abstain from sin because you love God—ay, that is the thing. To cease from evil ways because

the Lord Jesus Christ has loved you and given himself for you, and you have been led to put your sole trust in the merit of his precious blood—this is a genuine work of grace. You love him because he first loved you, and then you say, "Now will I with holy earnestness keep myself clean from every sin, and fly from everything that is not upright, and true, and honest, and kind, and good, and pure. I will purge myself, by the help of God's Divine Spirit, from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit." When you endure temptation out of love to God, then you are blessed.

"Well," says one, "I do not yet see the peculiar blessedness of this." You would, dear friend, if you had ever possessed it. I do not need for a moment to explain to the child of God what a blessed condition he is in who has endured temptation out of love to God; for there is first a main element of blessedness in the fact that *it is a blessed thing to love God.* I cannot see how a man can be unhappy who really loves God. If you love God you cannot be cast into hell, because there can be no hell in the heart that loves God. Love to God is in itself such a delightful emotion that before long the indulgence of it perfumes the whole mind with happiness. To love thee, my God! To love thee, my God! Surely if thou givest me no more than this I will bless thee for ever and ever. It is heaven enough for such a poor creature as I am, to be permitted to love the Lord my God with all my heart, and soul, and strength.

Then there arises out of the endurance of temptation *a sense of God's acceptance.* The text saith, "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is approved": that is the new version, and a very correct one, too. Not so much when he *is* tried, but when he *has been* tried—when he has been put into the fining pot, and has come out warranted to be real unalloyed gold; when he is proved, and therefore approved, then he shall receive the crown of life."

After the tried man has stood against temptation, God says of him "Now I know that thou fearest me," as he said concerning Abraham after he had tried him. "Now I know that thou fearest God." This approval of God breeds a holy delight in the soul. The soul becomes conscious of the approbation of God; and I venture to say that any man who has felt that approbation in his heart knows the beginning of heaven. Blessed is that man who consciously enjoys his Maker's approval, who can stand up before the infinitely Holy One, and say, "Although I have sinned, my Lord Jesus has washed me in his blood, and the Holy Spirit has helped me to resist the temptations which once overcame me; and I know that the gracious Father approves me." This is, indeed, blessedness; I know of nothing to exceed it. Blessed is the man that steadfastly endures temptation, for the Lord himself is well pleased with him.

There comes over the back of this a number of things to help to make such a man blessed; for he has *great thankfulness in his soul* "O God," he says, "I thank thee that I have been kept while passing through those temptations." He is as glad as one who has been taken out of a burning house. I have known what it is to escape from a strong temptation without falling into it, and I think that I have felt as grateful to God as a man would be who had seen a shark after him,

and had been almost between its jaws, and had just slipped away as he heard the monster close his mouth with a snap. I remember standing under a building which was in course of erection and seeing a mass of stone fall from a great height just in front of me. What a thud it made! How narrow was my escape! How I started! But what joy filled my heart! So it is when one is delivered from temptation—from temptation which began to overpower the heart. As David said, "My feet had almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped." You remember Bunyan's description of the feelings of Christian when he had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and was able to look back by the morning light. He was struck with awe to think that he had ever passed through such a war as that, with an abyss on one side, and a quagmire on the other. The road was haunted with sprites and hobgoblins, and beset with traps and gins and snares beyond all count; and yet he had actually come through that way in safety. When he saw what he had escaped, what could he do but down on his knees and bless God with all his heart that he had been protected through so great a peril?

It helps to make a man blessed when his mind is filled with holy gratitude to God who has preserved him.

> "Kept alive with death so near,
> I to God the glory give,"

says the man; and he is blessed by the thankfulness which he so gladly expresses.

Besides, another feeling comes over him—that of *deep humility.* "Oh," says he, "what a wonder of grace I am! However is it that I have escaped such peril? With such a base nature as mine, how have I been kept from destruction? I shall to-morrow perish and fall unless the Lord himself be still my helper." Putting his trust in God, that sense of his own nothingness, accompanied with a sense of his perfect security in God, makes him feel exceedingly happy. A little rabbit, hunted and pursued, rushes through a narrow crevice under the rock and enters the place where he has his burrow. How quiet he is when he is once there! He hears many noises, but he knows that he is quite safe; not because he is so big or so strong, but because he is so little and so weak, that he has been able to stow himself away under the rock where nobody can get at him. Such a feeling is blessedness to the child of God—to be nothing, but for Christ to be everything to him; to be weak to the last degree, but for God's strength to be his everlasting security. Hence such a man who has been hunted by temptation and driven into the cleft of the rock Christ Jesus, enjoys a very singular and remarkable blessedness.

And, once more, he enjoys *a fearlessness of heart.* It must be an awful thing to go about the world and feel, "I fell under that temptation the other day, and I would not have it known for all the world. I fell into that vile deed on such and such an occasion; and if it were known, where should I be?" Poor wretch! I have heard of a toad under a harrow, and I have often admired that situation without wishing to be in it; but that must be heaven to the position of men who are conscious that they have not been true to conscience or true to

God, and yet have kept up a flaming profession. What poor creatures are those jackdaws who strut about in feathers which are not their own! A guilty conscience is the back door to hell. But he that knows that, before God, he has stood though tempted, and that though often assailed he has never been vanquished, can walk through the world and care for no man. The forked tongue of slander has no power with him: he has an antidote against the venom of malice. The noise and strife of this world can little distress him, for innocence walls him up against the onslaught of the enemy. He stands like a rock in the midst of the raging billows, for God has given him steadfastness of soul; and is not that blessedness? If it is not, I cannot tell what is. Young men beginning the Christian life, pray that you may be helped to endure temptation, for in that endurance lies blessedness, like a pearl within a rough oyster-shell. All of you that take the name of Christ upon you, ask for grace to stand fast in your integrity, for as the beauty of the palm is its uprightness, so is integrity the glory of the man. Ask for power to stand against every wind and wave, because you have heard Christ's words and have practised them, and are therefore like houses that are built upon rocks. Ask for grace that your piety may be such as will stand every assault of the world, the flesh and the devil, for "blessed is the man that endureth temptation."

So ready are we to sin, that to prevail over one temptation is a great joy; to have overcome many temptations is a multitudinous blessedness; to have overcome them all will be an infinite heaven. The poet Spenser seems to anticipate that we shall all be overcome if the battle last long enough; just as a famous politician was wont to say that every man has his price. At any rate, it will be a great rapture to fight out the last conflict and conquer in it. Oh to be victorious in our last Armageddon! It will be a joy worth worlds to disprove the Spenserian stanza which I have alluded to, which may well make the boldest tremble:—

> "But all in vain; no fort can be so strong,
> No fleshly breast can armèd be so sound,
> But will at last be won with battery long,
> Or unawares at disadvantage found.
> Nothing is sure that grows on earthly ground,
> And who most trusts in arm of fleshly might,
> And boasts in beauty's chain not to be bound,
> Doth soonest fall in disadventurous fight,
> And yields his caitiff neck to victor's most despite."

With this dark prophecy ringing in our ears, we can truly call him blessed who endures right on, and never starts aside, let the test be what it may.

Thus I have set before you what the blessed man is on earth.

II. Just a few words on WHAT THE BLESSED MAN IS TO BE BY-AND-BY. "When he is approved, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him."

He shall receive a crown. Of course the allusion is to the Grecian games. See how the man runs! Every muscle is strained. There is not a part of his body but what is violently exercised. He tries to pass his fellows. He flies to the goal; he reaches it; and then he receives a crown. A crown of laurel, or of ivy, or, perhaps, of parsley,

was put upon his head. It had no value in itself. The Greeks were so little honest that a man could not have kept his crown in his house if it had been worth a penny. Strong rooms and iron safes had not then been dreamed of, and therefore they gave the athletic Greek a crown of fading leaves; and yet many men threw away health and even life to gain that paltry wreath. Though it was intrinsically worthless, it had about it a meaning which made each leaf inexpressibly precious to him who laboured for it and obtained it. Now, if we live by God's own grace through faith in Christ, a life that shall be full of purity and holiness, God will give us a crown, not of laurel, nor of parsley, nor even of gold and rarest gems, but a "crown of life that he has promised to them that love him." Very wonderful, is it not, that God should reward our poor endeavours? Yet so he will.

Let us dwell, just for a minute, upon the figure of *a crown*. What did that crown mean? It meant something done—a race finished, a battle fought, a prize poem written with care and accepted by the Greek world. It recorded and rewarded something done. Oh it will be glorious at last for Christ to say, "Well done!" That crown which is promised us is not for talk, nor thought, nor vow, but it records something done.

It was something appreciated—appreciated by him that gave the crown. It will be no small heaven for God himself to appreciate our poor lives! We think little of them if we are gracious, but God thinks much of them because he is gracious. It is ours to humble ourselves for our imperfections, but it is God's, despite the imperfections, to see what we desire to be, and what in heart we really are. It is our blessedness both now and for ever to be accepted in Christ Jesus. A crown signifies something done, and that something appreciated.

A crown meant reward. Now, in the gospel system there is room for a reward, though it is not of debt, but of grace. The child of God, like Moses, has "respect unto the recompense of the reward." He does not run to win a crown by his own merit, but he runs knowing that there will be a crown given to him according to the love and goodness of the God of grace. It is not difficult for a child of God to hate legality, and yet to expect a reward at the last. He knows how the great Lord who saves us by his grace does also reward us according to his grace. God grant us, brethren, then, to be living so as to receive the gracious reward of a holy life.

There is a crown for me. Does it make you laugh? I trow I seldom think of it without beginning to laugh. Shall you and I wear crowns? Shall it even be that our poor limpings will yet win the race—that our staggering struggles will yet overcome, and that we shall be crowned? O you dear Christian people that live in poverty and obscurity, I have a reverence for your heads which are already anointed with grace, for your heads that are yet to be crowned with glory. You run—often run better than the greatest and most observed of your fellow Christians; and you shall not miss your reward. There is a crown laid up, not only for Paul, but for all them that love our Lord's appearing." Wherefore, laugh to yourselves, not with unbelief as Sarah did, but with a holy joy, as Abraham did. Shall I have a crown? Shall this aching brow be decked with amaranth? Shall this forehead

be decked with a tiara? O my God, wilt thou set a coronet upon my head? Then will I gird up my loins and quicken my pace, since the crown is so sure to those who run with patience.

Now go an inch farther in the text: "*A crown of life.*" What must that be! What is a crown of life? A crown is a dead thing. There, put it by: put it by. Somebody may steal it, if they think it worth the snatching at; but after all it is a poor lifeless circlet. A crown is made of a somewhat rare earth which men call gold, a substance yellow and cold which is hammered and sold, to break hearts, and buy immunity for vice. Poor stuff! In crowns there are also jewels. Pebbles, or perhaps consolidated gases which flash and blaze in a cold joyless light of their own. A crown is a dead hard weight. But if we serve the Lord aright, we are to have "a crown *of life.*"

What is life? Well, I thought to myself this morning as I was preaching, and the multitude were listening so eagerly, "This is life." It was no dead work to preach. Sometimes one preaches, and you are like a yacht out at sea without a capful of wind, and there you lie dead, becalmed, motionless. Many a sermon resembles a dead ship on a dead sea; but when the breeze is up, and you fly before it merrily, then you say, "This is life." This kind of thing comes to us in our spiritual work, as well as in our everyday course. Life does not mean existence. Why, they say that when God promises eternal life to Christians, it means that they shall eternally exist. They always must eternally exist, because God has made their souls immortal; but there is no blessing in eternal existence; on the contrary, it may curdle into a curse. The blessing is in eternally living; and what is living? It is not mere existing. In fact, existence, though it be essential to life, does not enter into the meaning of life, nor so much as come near it. To live means to be in health, to be in vigour, to be in force, to be in joy, to be in right and fit condition, to have one's whole self in order, and to enjoy all that surrounds you with all that is within you. God will give to all his people by-and-by such a crown of life. There shall be no sickness: the inhabitant shall no more say, "I am sick." There shall be no weakness: even our body shall be raised with power. There shall be no dulness: we shall be for ever fresh and young—led to living fountains of water. There shall be no emptiness, no sense of depletion, nor of want: we shall be for ever filled with all the fulness of God. There shall be no pain, no misery, but a plenitude of enjoyment at his right hand where there are pleasures for evermore. We shall possess and enjoy all that manhood can desire. All that you can ask or think shall be yours, and much more than that; inconceivable enjoyment, and bliss, and rapture, and ecstasy; all shall be bestowed upon you by the unstinted hand of boundless love. Life shall crown all. All your life shall be crowned; and all the crown shall be life! "A crown of life."

Does it not mean, however, as well—is it not a sort of Hebraism for a living crown? The crown they gave in the Olympic games soon faded. That bit of parsley, or olive, or laurel, was soon turned into faded leaves. But you shall have a living crown; that is to say, it shall never be taken from you, nor you from it. When yon sun grows pale with weariness; when his bright eye grows dim with age; when yonder moon

shall redden into blood as her brightness is o'ershaded, then shall your crown be as resplendent as ever. When time itself shall cease to be, and visible things shall die, and death itself shall be swallowed up, yet you shall not cease to be blessed, for you shall receive a living crown —a crown of everlasting life, which cannot know an end.

What is more, it shall be a living crown. The best thing in this world grows stale. If a man could have all the wealth, and all the art treasure of this world, he would soon grow tired of it. Did you ever go to see any exhibition without at last feeling, "Well, I have had enough of this; I would not care to come here every day"? But the crown of life will be just as fresh after myriads and myriads of ages as on the first day of your celestial coronation. There was a dear sister of ours, whom the most of us will never forget, Mrs. Bartlett. Blessed among women was that mother in Israel. She has been ten years in heaven to-day. Did you remember that? I should like to hear her story of her first ten years in Paradise. What a chapter to read, if she could write it, and send it down to us! I will warrant you that she has not known a weary moment. She has not known an instant in which her Lord has ceased to be to her a fulness of delight. I believe that she is beginning heaven now: it is the New Jerusalem to her still. She is just at the commencement of her bliss. Brethren, we shall be with her soon. Our own beginnings of glory are drawing near. Project yourselves through a million years till all that is prophesied shall be fulfilled; and there you are sitting among the angels. Hark! It is a new song they are singing, and you are evidently delighted with the new melody. Did you hear those harps? They strike out novel music. You have heard it long, but it is quite new to you. Look! Look at the brightness of the seraphs! They shine as burningly as if their glow had only but kindled yesterday. "But as for myself," says a bright spirit, clothed upon with his resurrection body, "it is a million years since I was down on earth, and sinned, and washed my robes in the blood of the Lamb; but I have needed no other washing. Come, brother, let us sing together, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,' for we have washed our robes and made them white in his precious blood; and therefore are we before the throne of God." They are always at their beginnings in the glory; for Christ is always their Alpha. They have always reached the fulness of their glory, for he is their Omega. O happy saints, that wear an ever living crown!

But listen once more. Did you ever try to indulge a speculation as to what the crown of life shall be? I mean this: You have a bulb in your hand of an unknown plant. I have had several lately from Central Africa. The missionary said, "Put it in your stove-house"; and I did. It did not look to me worth a half a farthing; it was an uncomely root. But it has developed large green leaves; it is growing rapidly; and "it doth not yet appear what it shall be." I am speculating upon the colour of the flowers, and the form of the fruit. I guess by the delicate velvetness of its leaves that it is going to turn out something very remarkable; but I cannot prophesy what it will be. Man by nature is that uncomely bulb. When he dies, you know what a poor dried-up bulb he seems to those who lay him in his coffin. Yet even here, when God gives spiritual life, what a beautiful thing the Christian is! There

is an amazing comeliness about the heavenly life even here below: yet we do not know what it is going to be. We know what spiritual life is, but we cannot guess what the flower of that life will be. Whatever it is to be, God will give that glory to those who by his grace endure temptation because they love him. You gentlemen who believe in evolution, as I do not, tell us what a man will come to when God has sanctified him fully by his grace, and he has passed through ages of blessedness. What will he be when his life develops into the crown of life? We make poor guess-work of it. But I will tell you what I mean to do. I pray you follow me therein. *I mean to go and see what this crown of life is like.* We do not know what we shall be, but we have heard a soft whisper say, "When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." Come, let us go to Jesus. First, let us haste away to his cross, and unitedly look up, and say, "We trust thee, Jesu." Then, from his cross let us come down and take his yoke upon us, and learn of him, and say, "Jesu, we will follow thee." Then, let us go with him into the thick throng of temptation, where Satan shall try us with wealth and honour, or with necessities even unto hunger, as he tried our Lord; and there let us stand and say, "We will wrestle with temptation, O Lord Jesus, even as thou didst." O Lord, when we have thus done, we will die with thee; and if thou comest not soon, we will lie asleep in thee; and when thou sayest, "Awake," we will answer, "Here we are." We will live with thee for ever and for ever; and thy joy shall be that crown of life which the Lord has promised of his own free, rich, sovereign grace to them that love him.

May every person in this congregation wear that crown! May you soldiers in your red coats over yonder win this crown, and wear it for ever! May you all be more than conquerors, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON.—Psalm lxxiii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN-BOOK"—674, 857.

ALMANACKS.—In point of originality and general freshness of its contents, we must once more give the palm to Mr. Spurgeon's "John Ploughman's Almanack" (Passmore and Alabaster, 1d.). His supply of sharp, and quaint, and wise, and witty proverbial sayings seems inexhaustible, while the other matter is up to the usual high-water mark. Of course he has his usual plea for orphan girls and boys, which we hope will meet with a wide response. "Spurgeon's Illustrated Almanack" (1d.) contains articles by the editor and other writers, daily texts, Metropolitan Tabernacle Directory, &c., with a number of striking illustrations.—*The Christian.*

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

THE PREACHER'S LAST SERMON FOR THE SEASON.

A Sermon

DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 29TH, 1885, BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

'In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."—John vii. 37.

THE officers were after our Lord, and he knew it. He could spy them out in the crowd, but he was not therefore in the least afraid, or disconcerted. He reminds me of that minister who, when he was about to preach, was stopped by a soldier, who held a pistol at his head, and threatened that if he spake he would kill him. "Soldier," said he, "Do your duty; I shall do mine"; and he went on with his preaching. The Saviour, without saying as much in words, said so by his actions. If they were sent to take him, let them take him; as for himself, the time was come to speak boldly, and therefore he stood and cried, saying, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

You see, it was the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles. From the middle of that festival the Lord had been present, and had openly taught the people, and they had seen him in the midst of the throng, lifting up his hands, and proclaiming holy doctrine. But the feast was over; the boughs were cleared away, and the tents, in which they had dwelt for a time, were taken down. It was the eighth day, which was spent as a Sabbath; but the Saviour did not cease to preach because the festival was almost over. Till the last day he continued to instruct, invite, and entreat. How this reminds us of his constant patience! It is but one instance, out of very many, of the Saviour's pertinacity of loving-kindness. Though the Jews had often refused him, he is still pleading with them. He hath come to his own, and they have not received him; but he waiteth to be gracious, he tarrieth in unwearied mercy; he endureth "even to this last"; and so, on "that great day of the feast," he has still a note of admonition, and a word of invitation for them. Oh, the patience of God to some here present! You have long heard the gospel, and although you have never given it due attention, still does the good Saviour strive with you, and press you to be considerate of your own best interests. Jesus urges you to live, persuades you to be saved. There are times when it would not be becoming to the honour of a king to press his favours upon those

who have distinctly despised and refused them; but it is ever the singular glory of our Lord Jesus Christ that he continues to entreat, even when we continue to resist. Even to our own last hour does the Lord of mercy sweetly cry, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Repent, dear hearer, of all your long delays, and come to Jesus this day, for he still invites you, saying evermore, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

Furthermore, our Lord did not only preach the gospel till the last day of the feast, but because it was the last day, he manifested an increased ardour in so doing; and whereas his custom was to *sit* and teach the people who gathered in a ring around him, on this closing day he now sought a prominent place, probably just outside the Temple, or in one of its outer courts, and there he *stood*, conspicuous before them all, in the attitude of one who has risen from his ease, and has come to meet those whom he invites. He assumed a position more active, more pleading, more earnest, than that of a seated teacher. Behold, he stands and pleads! That pleading is in tones both pathetic and loud: he "cries," "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

It is the last time that he will look into some of their faces. They are going back from Jerusalem, where they have kept the feast; they will get back to their farms and to their merchandise, and if he does not strike the iron while he has it on the anvil, he may never have another stroke at it. If at this time an invitation be not pressed upon them, they will forget the teaching they have heard, they will probably never hear any more, and they will die in their sins. I think I see the Master's face beaming with holy affection, and his eyes streaming with tears, as he pleads as for his life with the throng which is so soon to melt away. It is now or never with him, and with them. He must once more free himself of the blood of them all, and therefore on that "last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

I think it is noteworthy that, when the Master had gathered up all the forces of his soul, and his whole spirit was moved with intense anxiety for the good of men, then he especially preached the gospel of salvation. I do not know that he had before so publicly declared himself as the great fountain and source of salvation. He had taught this truth to the woman at the well of Samaria with special plainness, and he had spoken of it to different little companies with great distinctness; but now almost for the first time on this last day he brings it all out before the multitude, and cries, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Now is the invitation given most freely: now is the cry sounded forth most loudly. O ye that are perishing, O ye that are lost, O ye that want salvation, here is the place where you can find it—"Come unto me, and drink!" It seems to me that the Lord Jesus was driving only at this one thing—the getting of men to come to himself. At another time he would teach them deeper doctrine, or truth of a wider range; for his ministry dealt with many things for edification and holiness; but now, on this last day, he seems to put other matters on one side, and his one object is to win thirsty souls to come to him and drink. I have deep fellowship in that spirit this morning. I remember that I shall not have another morning's discourse with you for some time; and perhaps

I may never have another. I go from you for a season, and my voice will be silent among you. Therefore I said within my heart that I would preach this morning upon the one subject of coming to Christ, and upon nothing else. If you make mistakes about a thousand things, it will be very sad that you should do so; but not so sad as if you fell into an error upon this matter. If, peradventure, you should not know this or that, it may be greatly to your detriment, but nothing compared with not knowing the Lord Jesus. My brethren, my sisters, if you really come to Jesus, and assuage the thirst of your souls by drinking of that living water, which he so freely giveth, the main thing will be right, the chief thing will be secured. We will hope that all the rest will come right by-and-by, but just now we will look alone to that vital point. O you that thirst, come unto Christ, and drink; and if you do so, our morning's work will be fraught with untold blessedness to you! In my absence this shall be my solace, that my last word won your souls for Jesus.

I would further call your attention to this fact, that, while the Lord, on that last day, displayed an extraordinary ardour for men's souls, and preached the gospel more fully then than ever, he especially drove at this point, that they should come to himself. He spoke more pointedly, clearly, and exclusively of himself than ever; for, just in proportion as he preached the gospel, it was of necessity that he became a witness to himself, since there is no other gospel than that which is wrapped up in his own proper person and work. The more gospel, the more Christ, and the more Christ, the more gospel. So, when our Lord saith, If any man thirst, there is water to be had, he can do no other than say, "Let him come unto me, and drink." If that word must come forth from our Lord's own lips, how abundantly it ought to come from ours! Jesus stands up to be himself a centre, not alone for a congregation of people who hear him, but for a crowd of thirsty folk who are to drink of him. Jesus is the central sun of salvation, and from him the true light radiates on all sides. All who will turn their eyes to look unto him shall behold the light of life.

Beloved hearers, I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God as God has made it known to me; yet I do feel this morning that I would gladly let all other truth sink for the while, if I might but so preach my Lord Jesus that every unconverted person here might see him, and look to him with the glance of faith. I desire also that every converted person may again look to Jesus, and continue steadily to look until the glance of faith on earth shall melt into the vision of felicity in heaven. What a morning this would be if we all hastened to Jesus, and drank from him as from the sparkling fountain of grace! Why should we not? "Jesus stood, and cried," and his most ardent passion led him to cry concerning himself, that men should come to him, and find in him the supply for all their spiritual need. The more we love our fellow-men, the more we, too, shall tell them of Jesus, and of Jesus only.

This text I shall try to handle on this last Sabbath among you: may the Spirit of God handle it so as to make it useful to you one and all!

I. Notice, in the text, THE ENQUIRY FOR THE THIRSTY. Jesus stands amidst that mass of people from every land, the mingled tribes, scattered far and wide, who came up to Jerusalem to keep the feast,

and he cries among them, "If any man thirst." Evidently, he is seeking out needy, restless, longing hearts.

Observe that he starts with *a very wide enquiry:* he seeks for any man, and consequently for every man, that thirsts. So does the gospel at this hour come with a generous and wide appeal. Hast thou any desire after God? Hast thou any will to be rid of thy sin? Hast thou any anxiety to escape from the wrath to come? Hast thou any weariness after Jesus, and the rest which he alone can give? Dost thou desire to be made pure? Is there a heart in thee which sighs after better things? Dost thou long after a higher, and holier, and more heavenly life? Well, whoever thou mayest be, Jesus saith, "Come unto me, and drink." There gathered that day about the Temple, not only men of Judea and Galilee, but Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia. In fact, all sorts of people, even as on the day of Pentecost, came up to keep the feast; and without making any exception whatever in his generous invitation, our good Master stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Beneath the arch of heaven that same call sounds out to every thirsty soul of every clime. Wherever the sound of my voice is heard this morning, and wherever the printed sermon will be read, a sincere invitation comes, without exception, to every soul that longs and thirsts after God, and pardon, and mercy, and eternal life, and heaven: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Do not turn away from this honest invitation to eternal life.

Yet there wails through our text an undertone of grief by which *it is anxiously narrowed down.* Wide as the invitation is, yet that "If," spoken in tenderly solemn tones of apprehension, reminds us that many are called, but few are chosen. "*If* any man thirst"—as if he had said, "The mass of you do not thirst: do any of you thirst? The multitudes do not thirst; only one here and there is doing so." Our Lord's glance sweeps over the throng; he reads their indifference, and spiritual death, and in plaintive accents he expresses his fear that none, or at least very few, are thirsting. Alas, the truly thirsty are few as flowers in winter! Self-content possesses the minds of many; and world-content steals over others. They are in a desert; no drop of dew falls about them, and the water-bottle that they carry has long since been dry; but they are mocked by the mirage, and they put aside their thirst with the fond idea that when they will they can drink to the full. An evil spirit has made them mad, and they own not the thirst which devours them. You may tell them of sin, and its danger, but they do not desire to confess it; their conscience is asleep. You talk of hell, and all its terrors, but either they do not believe you, or else they are so callous that they will risk an eternity of woe for the sake of a poor transient pleasure. You speak of Christ, and pardon bought with blood; but what is that to them? They go their way after the trifles of time and sense, and the great realities of eternity do not trouble them. "If any man thirst." Alas, a spiritually thirsty soul is a choice rarity! Where shall I find him? With what joy will I salute him! He is the man who will gladly receive the tidings of Jesus and his love.

The mass of the people are bereft of spiritual feeling: they neither hunger nor thirst after righteousness, but they have given themselves

up to enjoy the brutish lives of oxen, or of dogs. They live as if the whole of their existence were to be spent amid the shadows of this poor, benighted world, and as if there would never dawn upon our immortal natures an everlasting day. Such brutish men have no expectation of a resurrection, no fear of a judgment to come, no hope of heaven, and no dread of hell. Well doth the weeping Saviour put it, "If any man thirst."

The invitation is in itself wide, and is only focused by the deep sorrow of the Preacher. If any man thirst, he is bidden to come to Jesus. If thou, O man, hast stolen in here this morning, discontented with the pleasures of the world, thou art bidden to come to Jesus for rest and satisfaction. If thou art rich and increased in goods, and yet art quite unable to enjoy thy riches, because thine heart cannot be satisfied with the world, thou art he to whom this invitation comes. If thou art heavy with the burden of sin; if thou wouldst give thine eyes to be rid of it; if thou art despairing, and ready to die, because thy struggles after better things have all been failures; thou art he whom the Lord Jesus invites. With loving tenderness he puts it to all of you who want everything, but have no joy of anything, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." O man, if thou hast any sort of spiritual desire, any kind of longing after that which is good and gracious, come thou at once to Jesus, and Jesus will joyfully receive thee.

The call is painfully clear. "If any man thirst." The thirsty know what thirst is: it is a self-explaining pain. A man knows whether he thirsts or not. Nobody need take a minute to answer the question, "Do I thirst?" because, as to natural thirst, it is a pain or want which is readily discerned. If, my hearer, thou art really thirsty, thou knowest thou art thirsty. Art thou dissatisfied with thyself? Art thou grieved on account of sin? Art thou anxious to be right with God? Art thou pining to find thy Saviour? Thou art the man, and there is no question about it. Hear thou his voice while he graciously saith, "Come unto me, and drink."

Be it remembered that *this call is being continually repeated.* At this moment, though I speak it, my Master is with me, and is using me as his mouth. Jesus himself saith it, and not I: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Jesus is not standing now outside the Temple at Jerusalem, for he is gone from us, as to his bodily presence; but from yonder lofty place at the right hand of God he still speaketh, and he cries, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Jesus is accessible still. You may come to him at this hour. A prayer will bring thee to him; a sigh will find and reach him; and if, beneath the arch of heaven, in hall or cottage, in palace or prison, in the forest or on the sea, there be a man that thirsts, let him but come unto Jesus by faith, and he shall have all his needs supplied. It is a blessed invitation, standing good at this hour to thee, O friend! Yea, it will hold good even to a man's dying day; and this may be to thee that very day. Jesus hath not ceased to invite, nor will he cease to receive all that come to him.

Do you ask me again, "What is this thirst?" Thirst is nothing actual, or substantive; it is a lack, a want, crying out of its emptiness.

It is the absence of a necessary. Sinner, thou needest not look for any good thing in thyself; the thirst which is sought for is the absence of a good thing. Thirst is a painful need. Hast thou not needs? Thirst is an emptiness, a vacuum; it is the miss of that which is essential to life. Hast thou not such a miss? Thirst is conscious need, conscious to a painful degree; hast thou not this? This sense of need is thy thirst. The need naturally begets a pain. When our system needs drink, a merciful providence creates a pang so that we are driven to take notice that a requisite of life must be immediately supplied. Thirst rings the alarm-bell, and the mind and body set to work to supply the urgent demand. It were a dreadful thing if the system needed water and yet did not thirst; for we might be fatally injured before we knew that any harm was happening to us. The pain of thirst is a salutary warning that something very important is wanted. Now, soul, if thou art suffering from fear or despondency; if thou endurest heaviness of heart and disquietude of spirit; if thou hast a longing, a sighing, a pining after something better and holier, then thou art thirsty. If thou hast this thirst in any measure or degree, thou art bidden to come to Christ and drink. If thou hast not as yet a burning thirst, nor a fever, but if thou hast any sort of thirst, thou mayest come and drink. If thou dost in any measure long for mercy and renewal, thou art included in this invitation, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Do not look within thyself to find any good thing. Is thirst a good thing? Nay, thirst is an evil thing, to be removed; and if thou seest in thyself only evil things to be removed, thou hast all that Jesus sets forth in this text as the description of those whom he permits to come to himself. He saith so much, and no more—"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

I wonder whether I have found out the thirsty person this morning, Are you sitting upstairs in the top gallery? Or are you among the thicker company below? Where are you? Find yourself out now. Turn your eye inwardly: look not to your neighbour, but say within your own soul, "Yes, I thirst; perhaps not as I should, but still I do desire; I am uneasy, I have an unrest; there is an absence of good in me; oh, that my thirst were satisfied this morning!" Friend, thou art my man! Before we go further, let me salute thee, and say, "Man, my brother," or "Woman, my sister, the Lord Jesus saith unto thee, 'Come unto me, and drink.'"

Thus much upon the enquiry after the thirsty ones.

II. Here is, secondly, THE ONE DIRECTION FOR THE RELIEF OF ALL SUCH THIRSTY ONES: "Let him come unto me, and drink." There is one direction, and that one direction points solely to one source. All who would have their thirst assuaged must come to one fountain, to one Jesus. Observe, that *Christ, who gives the water which quenches spiritual thirst, directs us to come to himself personally.* Do notice this. "Let him come unto *me*, and drink." Do you ask, "What creed am I to believe, what doctrines am I to receive?" We will tell you of this by-and-by, but just now he that is set before you this morning is a Person, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. At the time when he spoke this text he had not been crucified, nor dead, nor buried, nor raised from the dead, but the text was spoken with a

foresight of all this, as you will see by reading two verses further on, where we are told that what Christ said took for granted his death and resurrection. "The Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified." In this verse our Lord speaketh as if he had been dead, and had risen, and had been glorified. So then, O soul, if thy thirst is to be assuaged, thou must come to Jesus the Son of God, who became the Son of man, who lived, who took human sin upon himself, and died for it, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God: who, being dead, was taken down from the cross, and laid in the grave, where he slept a little while, and then arose from among the dead into newness of life, and after forty days ascended on high, leading captivity captive! At this hour he sitteth at the right hand of God, all power being given unto him in heaven and in earth. In his glory he is this day able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him. You must come to him who has finished his redeeming work, and ever liveth to make intercession for us; and if you will come to him, he will give you the full supply of all the great needs of your nature. O, my hearer, whatever thy spiritual desire is, Jesus will grant it; whatever, in fact, thy soul requires between this place and glory, he will give it thee; but thou must come to him for it, and to him alone. Thou must come distinctly *to him*, and not to ceremonies, or sacraments, or priests, or churches, or assemblies, or creeds, or services, or doings, or feelings. Thou art not to eat or drink of the house, or of the servants; but the Master himself giveth thee himself to be thy bread from heaven. Thy salvation lies in that divine Person, whom by faith I see at this moment, clothed in the splendour of heaven, yet still wearing the marks of his passion. He looks like a lamb that has been slain: he presents a perpetually complete atonement, and continually reconciles sinners to God. There lies thy hope, and there alone. In that Person, I say, and in that Person only there is salvation.

All that a sinner wants is to be found in abundance in Jesus. The Lord Jesus invites all who feel their thirst to come to him and partake; feeling no diffidence as to his ability to meet all their cases. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." Though thy thirst be like that of a panting ox upon a sultry summer's day, who putteth down his mouth to the brook, and drinks as though he would leave it dry—thou mayest come, and feel no trembling as to the sufficiency of the living waters. Ay, you may come in your dozens, your scores, your hundreds, your thousands, your millions, and your hundreds of millions! There shall never be a time when the Lord Jesus shall bid the thirsty stay away because the current of his grace is exhausted. He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink," without stint or measure; there is nothing to limit the draught or question the supply. In Jesus there is such a fulness that it never will be exhausted. Sin may be exhausted, the race may be numbered, time may be finished, and need may be ended, but mercy endureth for ever.

There is in Christ Jesus a varied supply. The thirst of the soul is not like the thirst of the body, which is readily quenched by any one liquid, for the thirst of the soul is for many things. Whatsoever many things the soul thirsts for, Jesus will supply them all: our

wonderful variety of wants is met by his wonderful variety of excellences. Here is a soul that wants peace: "this Man shall be the peace." "I am unhinged, I am almost driven to distraction, I am sore troubled, so that I cannot sleep." Thou shalt have rest by coming to Jesus: "he giveth his beloved sleep." "But I am so guilty, I have sinned past all pardon; I blush to think how grievously I have trespassed." Thou canst have pardon for all thy sins, though they be as glaring as scarlet, and though for number they be as many as the sands of the sea. In Jesus the penitent finds perfect pardon for all his offences. Believest thou this? It is certainly so. God will cast all thy transgressions into the depths of the sea, if thou believest in the Lord Jesus. How happy is the man who, by faith in Jesus, knows that the Lord has fully and freely forgiven him! "But I want purity," cries a third. "I am troubled with horrible thoughts. I have a strong passionate nature, which draws me into wrong desires. I have been a drunkard, I have been unchaste, I have been given to the use of foul language; and these things are a source of continued defilement." Oh, my friend, thou canst get rid of all this, if thou desirest to do so, by coming to Jesus! He will give thee a new heart, and a right spirit; he will change thy nature totally, so that this evil shall never more have dominion over thee; but where sin abounded, grace shall much more abound. Dost thou hear this? All purity is in Christ for thee. "But I," says one, "desire to make progress. I hope I am right, and I want to be more right. I want to make advances in the divine life, so as to honour God, and bless my fellow-men." Come, then, to the Lord Jesus, and drink, for he giveth life, and giveth it more abundantly. "But I want," says a Christian, "power in prayer, and power to convince and convert my fellow-men." Come then to Jesus for it: concerning this also he saith, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." He will make thee strong upon thy knees, and mighty in holy service, if thou wilt but surrender thy will to him. "But I want perseverance," cries another; "I can scarcely hold on my way; I am hard put to it; I faint even though I resolve to pursue." Come to him, then, for persevering grace. "He will keep the feet of his saints." Find thy strength to stand, and thine ability to endure, in him alone. If any man thirst for anything that is really desirable, let him come to Jesus, in whom all right desires are provided for. All for sinners and all for saints will be found in Jesus our Lord, who is all in all.

Still remember that *it is to Jesus only that thou must come*, and thou must bring nothing of thine own with thee. All thou art bidden to do lies in these two things: *come*, and *drink*. Christ is accessible; and thou mayest *come* to him. He does not stand with a gulf between him and thee, mockingly crying, "Come." No, but he cometh where thou art to-day, in all thy misery and sin, and he sweetly whispers, "Come." Arise, then, for he calleth thee. He shortens the way for thee; nay, he is himself the Way. He comes to thee, and he saith, "Come to me," not because there is now a vast distance to traverse, but because there is only a step, and he would have thee take it at once. Do but trust him, and thou hast come to him. This coming is not so much an exercise of power, as the resignation of power. Submit thyself to Jesus, yield to him, be willing that he should be everything to thee; and thou hast truly come to him.

Then thou art told to *drink*. That is not a difficult action. Any fool can drink: in fact, many are great fools because they drink too much of poisonous liquors. Drinking is peculiarly the common-place act of sinners. "Drink!" Surely thou canst do that! Thou hast only to be as a sponge that sucks up all that comes near it. To drink is the act of a babe, a sick man, a wounded deer, or even a little chick. Put thy mouth down, and suck up that which flows to thee in the river of Christ's love. See how a babe newborn drinketh from its mother's breast; be thou as that weak babe; and take in Christ according to thy capacity. He bids thee receive him; why hesitate? Thou art not to bring anything to Jesus, but to take everything from him, as the thirsty ground opens its mouth, and drinks in the showers, many as they may be. Open wide thy soul, and drink in Christ, as the great northern whirlpool sucks in the sea. Pull up the sluices, and let streams of mercy flow through thee in glorious torrents. It is all he bids thee do; it is, in fact, to do nothing but to receive thy God. If any man thirst, let him receive Christ. This, then, is the one direction for the assuagement of the burning thirst of all sin-sick souls.

III. Consider, in the third place, THE PERMISSION HERE GIVEN FOR THEIR PARTICIPATION. I have told you where the water is, but the question comes, "May I drink of it?" If thou thirstest, drink. No limit is placed in our text. "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." *There is no limit as to what thou hast formerly done.* "Oh, but I have been so guilty, so hardened; I have uttered bitter words; I have even spoken against God and his Christ; I have denied the deity of our Lord; I have gone aside into all manner of crooked ways!" Whatever thou hast done, if thou hast now any longing after God and thy Saviour, come thou freely, just as thou art, for he bids thee come and drink. "But I dare not say what I have done, sir." Thou needest not say it to me; it were better thou shouldest not. Confess it unto God alone; and though thou be black as seven midnights, and foul as seven hells, thou mayest come to Jesus just as thou art, and receive from him complete absolution. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

Neither is there any limit put as to where thou hast gone before. I remember one who wanted to purchase a certain article, and he called upon one of the chief merchants, and asked his price. When this was given him, he went his way to half-a-dozen other traders, and tried to buy at a cheaper rate. He did not succeed, but, on the contrary, he found that the first had quoted the lowest price. When he walked a second time into that shop, his advances were not welcomed. "No," said the merchant, "I shall not serve you now: you have been all round the town, and if you could have got it a farthing cheaper you would not have been here. I don't care for such customers." It is not thus with our Lord Jesus: he maketh and keepeth a free trade in grace. If thou hast gone to Moses, if thou hast gone to Rome, if thou hast gone to priest or father-confessor; yea, if thou hast gone to the devil, yet still thou mayest come to Christ. Do not fear a refusal. He still saith, "If any man thirst"; though he has been to all the wells on earth, and found them dry, still this well is full, and he is permitted to drink at it. "Let him come unto me, and drink."

There is no limit because of any kind of lack. "Oh," says one, "I am deficient in tenderness; I am deficient in penitence!" Whatsoever you are deficient in, so much the greater is your thirst; but the Lord meeteth that thirst in all respects. If any man lack anything, the Lord will supply that lack: if any man be conscious that he has a great and grievous lack of that which is most essential, as when one has need of water which is essential to life, let him come to Christ, and drink.

"Surely," says one, "I cannot be intended, for I am in peculiar circumstances; I am very old." Come and drink, if thou hast any thirst, though thou be as old as Methuselah. "But I am so poor." The poorer thou art, the more welcome thou art. Come thou, in thy smock-frock, and drink. "But I cannot read." Never mind: the text does not say, "Read," but "Drink." At the polling-booths many are met with who cannot read, but none who cannot drink. I have known some that could not read a letter who could drink a churnful: drinking is an ability which is very widely distributed. The power to receive is scarcely a power, and yet it is the only power needed for salvation. Come along, and take what Christ doth freely give you. "Alas, I am so different from others!" Does the text say that any are shut out because they are different from others? No; Jesus stood and cried, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

Sorrowfully I notice that some are ingeniously trying to lock the door against themselves with the very key that was meant to open it. "Alas," one cries, "I am *afraid I do not thirst!*" Tell me, then, what is the matter with you. "Sir," I have not such a sense of need as I ought to have": that is to say, you are sensible that you are more needy than you think you are. If you are conscious that you are not fully aware of all your need, then I urge you to come to Jesus, just as you are, for if ever there was a thirsty soul, you are one. You even need a sense of need, and this proves that you are horribly in need. You are neediest among the needy, and should be among the first to come.

"I am afraid I do not thirst." Tell me, would you come if you did thirst? "That I would." Then come at once, and none will cast you out; because when you come it will be clear that you must have thirsted, for none ever come to Jesus who do not thirst. I am reasoning with you in a roundabout way, as you do with me. "But I want to thirst more." Then come and drink, and you shall thirst more; that is to say, you shall know more of your need of Christ than you do now, for they that find Christ value Christ more than those who, as yet, have never found him. Come if you do thirst, and come if you think you do not thirst, but wish you did thirst; for that wish to thirst is the very thirst you wish for. The sense that you have no proper sense of need is the very best sense that can be. Your want of a power to feel your want is your greatest want; consciousness of your own unconsciousness is the truest consciousness. Your groaning because you cannot groan is the deepest groaning that ever is groaned. Therefore, come along with you; keep not back through shame or fear, for Jesus will give you a hearty welcome, and supply everything you can possibly require. The more unfit you feel yourself to be, the more are you invited to come: your very unfitness is your fitness for coming to Jesus. It is

not what you have that God asks for; but he invites you to bring before him what you have not, that he may meet your pressing need, and give you all things to enjoy. He takes advantage of your poverty in a blessed manner. You know how men do with one another: if they find a man utterly reduced, they grind him down still more. Now, the Lord takes advantage of your poverty to lift you up. The less there is in you that is good, the more you need a Saviour, and the more readily does that Saviour present himself to you. If you are starved to the last extremity, and if there be not a drop of oil in the cruse, nor a handful of meal in the barrel, only look to Christ, and he will spread your table with food convenient for you. Only confess your emptiness, and all his fulness is at your disposal.

There is one thing I should like you to think of, and that is, when Christ says, "Come unto me, and drink," *nobody else can say you nay;* for surely the Lord Jesus is master of himself, and his warrants run in his own kingdom. If he says "come unto me," who is to keep you away? If you were master of a large estate, and said to a poor man, "Walk round it, go where you please"; and if your bailiff should meet this person and warn him off as a trespasser, would you not expect the poor man to say, "Your master gave me permission, and I will not be shut out by you"? So, if the devil, or conscience, or anything else, says to you, "You must not hope in divine mercy, nor in any other way lay hold of Christ," you may boldly reply, "Your Master said I might. Jesus himself said, 'If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink!' I thirsted, I came, and I received, and I will never give up what I have received; for I have Christ's permit to have it, and keep it I will." Oh, how I wish these words of encouragement would meet the cases of many before me! I thought I should have a full house this morning, and if it had been fine weather we should have been densely crowded: but when I saw it raining so very heavily I fancied we should have comparatively few, and perhaps it would be better to change the topic? But I said, "Never mind, I will preach the same sermon to the few as to the many," because I recollect the morning when I found the Saviour myself. It was as wet and miserable a morning as the present one, and, moreover, the ground was covered with a deep snow, sleet was falling fast, and the wind was blowing bitterly. I had intended to go to another place of worship half a mile further on, but I could not reach it through stress of weather, else I would not have turned into the little Primitive Chapel. I do not suppose there were more than twenty people present that morning, but it did not matter. That poor man's morning's work was satisfactory; for the Lord blessed a youth who has since then preached to many thousands. Among a few the best success may yet be gained. Perhaps, this morning, I am to catch some souls who will be useful to multitudes of others. Yonder young man who has come here, he hardly knows why, is to be decided for Jesus. He would not have been here if it had not been so wet; he is the very man the Lord hath need of, and when he is converted he shall be used for the Lord's glory. At any rate, from this pulpit rings out the blessed invitation with trumpet-voice, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."

IV. We close with THE ENTREATY FOR THEIR COMING. Jesus pleads with them to come. "Jesus stood and cried." I cannot picture

the enthusiasm of his soul, the passion of his heart, as he spoke that morning. "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink." The tones of that pleading voice were both striking and wooing, forcible and tender. When on that last occasion he addressed the people he poured out his whole soul pleading with them that they would come to him then and there. Dear hearts, when I think of Christ entreating us to come, I am astonished that we should need such pleading, and that he should give it. Surely the boot should be on the other foot. Ought we not to entreat him to let us come? Should we not fall on our knees, and plead for permission to receive the Saviour? Instead of that we are cold and callous; and it is he that is eager for us to come. He loves us better than we love ourselves! When a man has charity to give away, does he entreat people to come and accept it? No; but they come, and knock at his door, and beg him to give it to them. How strange is this, that you should be unwilling, and Christ anxious; that you should be backward, and Christ forward; that Jesus should cry "Come," and you should sit still and decline his calls! Should you not come when Jesus himself invites, and even entreats? Is it not baseness, is it not gross hardness of heart if we do not receive him who speaks from heaven, and cries, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink"? You have not come before—that was wrong; but the times of your ignorance God winketh at, and bids you come *now*. Oh, that his sweet Spirit would accompany my words, so that you might feel your hearts melting towards the Saviour, and might say, "Yes, we will come, we will trust Jesus, we will receive his grace!" O my brother, if this be thy hearty consent to infinite love, then thy sorrow is ended, thy danger is over, and thy joy is begun. The Lord grant it, for his dear Son's sake. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—John vii.

HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—906, 492, 500.

LEAVING home in great weakness, I beg the loving sympathy of my friends towards my orphan family of 500 children. Generous donations at this season would be greatly valued by me. Direct them to C. H. SPURGEON, Westwood, Beulah Hill, Upper Norwood.

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

ROBINSON CRUSOE'S TEXT.

A Sermon

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, DECEMBER 27TH, 1885,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

ON AUGUST 30TH, 1885.

"Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."—Psalm l. 15.

ONE book charmed us all in the days of our youth. Is there a boy alive who has not read it? "Robinson Crusoe" was a wealth of wonders to me: I could have read it over a score times, and never have wearied. I am not ashamed to confess that I can read it even now with ever fresh delight. Robinson and his man Friday, though mere inventions of fiction, are wonderfully real to the most of us. But why am I running on in this way on a Sabbath evening? Is not this talk altogether out of order? I hope not. A passage in that book comes vividly before my recollection to-night as I read my text; and in it I find something more than an excuse. Robinson Crusoe has been wrecked. He is left in the desert island all alone. His case is a very pitiable one. He goes to his bed, and he is smitten with fever. This fever lasts upon him long, and he has no one to wait upon him—none even to bring him a drink of cold water. He is ready to perish. He had been accustomed to sin, and had all the vices of a sailor; but his hard case brought him to think. He opens a Bible which he finds in his chest, and he lights upon this passage, "*Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*" That night he prayed for the first time in his life, and ever after there was in him a hope in God, which marked the birth of the heavenly life.

De Foe, who composed the story, was, as you know, a Presbyterian minister; and though not overdone with spirituality, he knew enough of religion to be able to describe very vividly the experience of a man who is in despair, and who finds peace by casting himself upon his God. As a novelist, he had a keen eye for the probable, and he could think of no passage more likely to impress a poor broken spirit than this. Instinctively he perceived the mine of comfort which lies within these words.

Now I have everybody's attention, and this is one reason why I thus

commenced my discourse. But I have a further purpose; for although Robinson Crusoe is not here, nor his man Friday either, yet there may be somebody here very like him, a person who has suffered shipwreck in life, and who has now become a drifting, solitary creature. He remembers better days, but by his sins he has become a castaway, whom no man seeks after. He is here to-night, washed up on shore without a friend, suffering in body, broken in estate, and crushed in spirit. In the midst of a city full of people, he has not a friend, nor one who would wish to own that he has ever known him. He has come to the bare bone of existence now. Nothing lies before him but poverty, misery, and death.

Thus saith the Lord unto thee, my friend, this night, "*Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*" You have come here half hoping that there might be a word from God to your soul; "half-hoping," I said; for you are as much under the influence of dread as of hope. You are filled with despair. To you it seems that God has forgotten to be gracious, and that he has in anger shut up the bowels of his compassion. The lying fiend has persuaded thee that there is no hope, on purpose that he may bind thee with the brazen fetters of despair, and hold thee as a captive to work in the mill of ungodliness so long as thou livest. Thou writest bitter things against thyself, but they are as false as they are bitter. The Lord's mercies fail not. His mercy endureth for ever; and thus in mercy does he speak to thee, poor troubled spirit, even to thee—"*Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*"

I have the feeling upon me that I shall at this time speak home, God helping me, to some poor burdened spirit. In such a congregation as this, it is not everybody that can receive a blessing by the word that is spoken, but certain minds are prepared for it of the Lord. He prepares the seed to be sown, and the ground to receive it. He gives a sense of need, and this is the best preparation for the promise. Of what use is comfort to those who are not in distress? The word to-night will be of no avail, and have but little interest in it, to those who have no distress of heart. But, however badly I may speak, those hearts will dance for joy which need the cheering assurance of a gracious God, and are enabled to receive it as it shines forth in this golden text: "*Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*" It is a text which I would have written in stars across the sky, or sounded forth with trumpet at noon from the top of every tower, or printed on every sheet of paper which passes through the post. It should be known and read of all mankind.

Four things suggest themselves to me. May the Holy Ghost bless what I am able to say upon them!

I. The first observation is not so much in my text alone as in the text and the context. REALISM IS PREFERRED TO RITUALISM. If you will carefully read the rest of the Psalm you will see that the Lord is speaking of the rites and ceremonies of Israel, and he is showing that he has little care about formalities of worship when the heart is absent from them. I think we must read the whole passage: "I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy

folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains : and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee : for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats ? Offer unto God thanksgiving ; and pay thy vows unto the Most High : and call upon me in the day of trouble : I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Thus praise and prayer are accepted in preference to every form of offering which it was possible for the Jew to present before the Lord. Why is this ?

First of all I would answer, real prayer is far better than mere ritual, because *there is meaning in it*, and when grace is absent, there is no meaning in ritual ; it is as senseless as an idiot's game.

Did you ever stand in some Romish cathedral and see the daily service, especially if it happened to be upon a high day ? What with the boys in white, and the men in violet, or pink, or red, or black, there were performers enough to stock a decent village. What with those who carried candlesticks, and those who carried crosses, and those who carried pots and pans, and cushions and books, and those who rang bells, and those who made a smoke, and those who sprinkled water, and those who bobbed their heads, and those who bowed their knees, the whole concern was very wonderful to look at, very amazing, very amusing, very childish. One wonders, when he sees it, whatever it is all about, and what kind of people those must be who are really made better by it. One marvels also what an idea pious Romanists must have of God if they imagine that he is pleased with such performances. Do you not wonder how the good Lord endures it ? What must his glorious mind think of it all ?

Albeit that the incense is sweet, and the flowers are pretty, and the ornaments are fine, and everything is according to ancient rubric; what is there in it? To what purpose that procession? To what end that decorated priest?—that gorgeous altar? Do these things mean anything? Are they not a senseless show?

The glorious God cares nothing for pomp and show; but when you call upon him in the day of trouble, and ask him to deliver you, there is meaning in your groan of anguish. This is no empty form ; there is heart in it, is there not ? There is meaning in the appeal of sorrow, and therefore God prefers the prayer of a broken heart to the finest service that ever was performed by priests and choirs. There is meaning in the soul's bitter cry, and there is no meaning in the pompous ceremony. In the poor man's prayer there are mind, heart, and soul; and hence it is real unto the Lord. Here is a living soul seeking contact with the living God in reality and in truth. Here is a breaking heart crying out to the compassionate Spirit. Ah! you may bid the organ peal forth its sweetest and its loudest notes, but what is the meaning of mere wind passing through pipes ? A child cries, and there is meaning in *that*. A man standing up in yonder corner groans out, "O God, my heart will break!" There is more force in his moan than in a thousand of the biggest trumpets, drums, cymbals, tambourines, or any other instruments of music wherewith men seek to please God nowadays. What madness to think that God cares for musical sounds, or ordered marchings, or variegated garments ! In a tear, or a sob, or a cry, there is meaning, but in mere sound there is no sense, and God

cares not for the meaningless. He cares for that which hath thought and feeling in it.

Why does God prefer realism to Ritualism? It is for this reason also that *there is something spiritual in the cry of a troubled heart;* and "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Suppose I were to repeat to-night the finest creed for accuracy that was ever composed by learned and orthodox men; yet, if I had no faith in it, and you had none, what were the use of the repetition of the words? There is nothing spiritual in mere orthodox statement if we have no real belief therein: we might as well repeat the alphabet, and call it devotion. And if we were to burst forth to-night in the grandest hallelujah that ever pealed from mortal lips, and we did not mean it, there would be nothing spiritual in it, and it would be nothing to God. But when a poor soul gets away into its chamber, and bows its knee and cries, "God be merciful to me! God save me! God help me in this day of trouble!" there is spiritual life in such a cry, and therefore God approves it and answers it. Spiritual worship is that which he wants, and he will have it, or have nothing. "They that worship him *must* worship him in spirit and in truth." He has abolished the ceremonial law, destroyed the one altar at Jerusalem, burned the Temple, abolished the Aaronic priesthood, and ended for ever all ritualistic performance; for he seeketh only true worshippers, who worship him in spirit and in truth.

Further, the Lord loves the cry of the broken heart because *it distinctly recognizes himself as the living God,* in very deed sought after in prayer. From much of outward devotion God is absent. But how we mock God when we do not discern him as present, and do not come nigh unto his very self! When the heart, the mind, the soul, breaks through itself to get to its God, then it is that God is glorified, but not by any bodily exercises in which he is forgotten. Oh, how real God is to a man who is perishing, and feels that only God can save him! He believes that God is, or else he would not make so piteous a prayer to him. He said his prayers before, and little cared whether God heard or not; but he prays now, and God's hearing is his chief anxiety.

Besides, dear friends, God takes great delight in our crying to him in the day of trouble because *there is sincerity in it.* I am afraid that in the hour of our mirth and the day of our prosperity many of our prayers and our thanksgivings are hypocrisy. Too many of us are like boys' tops, that cease to spin except they are whipped. Certainly we pray with a deep intensity when we get into great trouble. A man is very poor: he is out of a situation; he has worn his shoes out in trying to find work; he does not know where the next meal is coming from for his children; and if he prays now it is likely to be very sincere prayer, for he is in real earnest on account of real trouble. I have sometimes wished for some very gentlemanly Christian people, who seem to treat religion as if it were all kid gloves, that they could have just a little time of the "roughing" of it, and really come into actual difficulties. A life of ease breeds hosts of falsehoods and pretences, which would soon vanish in the presence of matter-of-fact trials. Many a man has been converted to God in the bush of Australia by hunger, and weariness, and loneliness, who, when he was a wealthy man, surrounded by gay flatterers,

never thought of God at all. Many a man on board ship on yon Atlantic has learned to pray in the cold chill of an iceberg, or in the horrors of the trough of the wave out of which the vessel could not rise. When the mast has gone by the board, and every timber has been strained, and the ship has seemed doomed, then have hearts begun to pray in sincerity; and God loves sincerity. When we mean it; when the soul melts in prayer; when it is "I must have it, or be lost"; when it is no sham, no vain performance, but a real heart-breaking, agonizing cry, then God accepts it. Hence he says, "Call upon me in the day of trouble." Such a cry is the kind of worship that he cares for, because there is sincerity in it, and this is acceptable with the God of truth.

Again, in the cry of the troubled one *there is humility.* We may go through a highly brilliant performance of religion, after the rites of some gaudy church; or we may go through our own rites, which are as simple as they can be; and we may be all the while saying to ourselves, "This is very nicely done." The preacher may be thinking, "Am I not preaching well?" The brother at the prayer-meeting may feel within himself, "How delightfully fluent I am!" Whenever there is that spirit in us, God cannot accept our worship. Worship is not acceptable if it be devoid of humility. Now, when in the day of trouble a man goes to God, and says, "Lord, help me! I cannot help myself, but do thou interpose for me," there is humility in that confession and cry, and hence the Lord takes delight in them. You, poor woman over here, deserted by your husband, and ready to wish that you could die, I exhort you to call upon God in the day of trouble, for I know that you will pray a humble prayer. You, poor trembler over yonder; you have done very wrong, and are likely to be found out and disgraced for it, but I charge you to cry to God in prayer, for I am sure there will be no pride about your petition. You will be broken in spirit, and humble before God, and "a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Once more, the Lord loves such pleadings because *there is a measure of faith in them.* When the man in trouble cries, "Lord, deliver me!" he is looking away from himself. You see, he is driven out of himself because of the famine that is in the land. He cannot find hope or help on earth, and therefore he looks towards heaven. Perhaps he has been to friends, and they have failed him, and therefore, in sheer despair, he seeks his truest Friend. At last he comes to God; and though he cannot say that he believes in God's goodness as he ought, yet he has some dim and shadowy faith in it, or else he would not be coming to God in this his time of extremity. God loves to discover even the shadow of faith in his unbelieving creature. When faith does, as it were, only cross over the field of the camera, so that across the photograph there is a dim trace of its having been there, God can spy it out, and he can and will accept prayer for the sake of that little faith. Oh, dear heart, where art thou? Art thou torn with anguish? Art thou sore distressed? Art thou lonely? Art thou cast away? Then cry to God. None else can help thee; now art thou shut up to him. Blessed shutting up! Cry to him, for he can help thee; and I tell thee, in that cry of thine there will be a pure and true worship, such as God desires, far more than the slaughter of ten thousand bullocks, or the

pouring out of rivers of oil. It is true, assuredly, from Scripture, that the groan of a burdened spirit is among the sweetest sounds that are ever heard by the ear of the Most High. Plaintive cries are anthems with him, to whom all mere arrangements of sound must be as child's-play.

See then, poor, weeping, and distracted ones, that it is not Ritualism, it is not the performance of pompous ceremonies, it is not bowing and scraping, it is not using sacred words; but it is crying to God in the hour of your trouble; which is the most acceptable sacrifice your spirit can bring before the throne of God.

II. Come we now to our second observation. May God impress it upon us all! In our text we have ADVERSITY TURNED TO ADVANTAGE. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee."

We say it with all reverence, but God himself cannot deliver a man who is not in trouble, and therefore it is some advantage to be in distress, because God can then deliver you. Even Jesus Christ, the Healer of men, cannot heal a man who is not sick; so that it turns to our advantage to be sick, in order that Christ may heal us. Thus, my hearer, your adversity may prove your advantage by offering occasion and opportunity for the display of divine grace. It is great wisdom to learn the art of making honey out of gall, and the text teaches us how to do that; it shows how trouble can become gain. When you are in adversity, then call upon God, and you shall experience a deliverance which will be a richer and sweeter experience for your soul than if you had never known trouble. Here is the art and science of making gains out of losses, and advantages out of adversities.

Now let me suppose that there is some person here in trouble. Perhaps another deserted Robinson Crusoe is among us. I am not idly supposing that a tried individual is here; he is so. Well now, when you pray—and oh! I wish you would pray now—do you not see what a plea you have? You have first a plea from *the time:* "Call upon me in the day of trouble." You can plead, "Lord, this is a day of trouble! I am in great affliction, and my case is urgent at this hour." Then state what your trouble is—that sick wife, that dying child, that sinking business, that failing health, that situation which you have lost—that poverty which stares you in the face. Say unto the Lord of mercy, "My Lord, if ever a man was in a day of trouble, I am that man; and therefore I take leave and license to pray to thee now, because thou hast said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble.' This is the hour which thou hast appointed for appealing to thee: this dark, this stormy day. If ever there was a man that had a right given him to pray by thy own word, I am that man, for I am in trouble, and therefore I will make use of the very time as a plea with thee. Do, I beseech thee, hear thy servant's cry in this midnight hour."

Next, you can not only make use of the time as a plea; but you may urge *the trouble itself.* You may argue thus, "Thou hast said, 'Call upon me in the day of trouble.' O Lord, thou seest how great my trouble is. It is a very heavy one. I cannot bear it, or get rid of it. It follows me to my bed; it will not let me sleep. When I rise up it is still with me, I cannot shake it off. Lord, my trouble is an unusual one: few are afflicted as I am; therefore give me extraordinary succour! Lord, my trouble is a crushing one; if thou do not help me,

I shall soon be broken up by it!" That is good reasoning and prevalent pleading.

Further, turn your adversity to advantage by pleading *the command*. You can go to the Lord now, at this precise instant, and say, "Lord, do hear me, for thou hast commanded me to pray! I, though I am evil, would not tell a man to ask a thing of me, if I intended to deny him; I would not urge him to ask help, if I meant to refuse it." Do you not know, brethren, that we often impute to the good Lord conduct which we should be ashamed of in ourselves? This must not be. If you said to a poor man, "You are in very sad circumstances; write to me to-morrow, and I will see to your affairs for you;" and if he did write to you, you would not treat his letter with contempt. You would be bound to consider his case. When you told him to write, you meant that you would help him if you could. And when God tells you to call upon him, he does not mock you: he means that he will deal kindly with you. You are not urged to pray in the hour of trouble, that you may experience all the deeper disappointment. God knows that you have trouble enough without the new one of unanswered prayer. The Lord will not unnecessarily add even a quarter of an ounce to your burden; and if he bids you call upon him, you may call upon him without fear of failure. I do not know who you are. You may be Robinson Crusoe, for aught I know, but you may call on the Lord, for he bids you call; and, if you do call upon him, you can put this argument into your prayer:

> "Lord, thou hast bid me seek thy face,
> And shall I seek in vain?
> And shall the ear of sovereign grace
> Be deaf when I complain?"

So plead the time, and plead the trouble, and plead the command; and then plead with God *his own character*. Speak with him reverently, but believingly, in this fashion, "Lord, it is thou thyself to whom I appeal. Thou hast said, 'Call upon me.' If my neighbour had bidden me do so, I might have feared that perhaps he would not hear me, but would change his mind; but thou art too great and good to change. Lord, by thy truth and by thy faithfulness, by thy immutability and by thy love, I, a poor sinner, heart-broken and crushed, call upon thee in the day of trouble! Oh, help thou me, and help me soon; or else I die!" Surely you that are in trouble have many and mighty pleas. You are on firm ground with the angel of the covenant, and may bravely seize the blessing. I do not feel to-night as if the text encouraged *me* one-half so much as it must encourage others of you, for I am not in trouble just now, and you are. I thank God I am full of joy and rest; but I am half inclined to see if I cannot patch up a little bit of trouble for myself: surely if I were in trouble, and sitting in those pews, I would open my mouth, and drink in this text, and pray like David, or Elias, or Daniel, in the power of this promise, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."

O, you troubled ones, leap up at the sound of this word! Believe it. Let it go down into your souls. "The Lord looseth the prisoners." He has come to loose you. I can see my Master arrayed in his silken garments, his countenance is joyous as heaven, his face is bright as a

morning without clouds, and in his hand he bears a silver key. "Whither away, my Master, with that silver key of thine?" "I go," saith he, "to open the door to the captive, and to loosen every one that is bound." Blessed Master, fulfil thy errand; but pass not these prisoners of hope! We will not hinder thee for a moment; but do not forget these mourners! Go up these galleries, and down these aisles, and set free the prisoners of Giant Despair, and make their hearts to sing for joy because they have called upon thee in the day of trouble, and thou hast delivered them, and they shall glorify thee!

III. My third head is clearly in the text. Here we have FREE GRACE LAID UNDER BONDS.

Nothing in heaven or earth can be freer than grace, but here is grace putting itself under bonds of promise and covenant. Listen. "Call upon me in the day of trouble: *I will deliver thee.*" If a person has once said to you, "I will," you hold him; he has placed himself at the command of his own declaration. If he is a true man, and has plainly said, "I will," you have him in your hand. He is not free after giving a promise as he was before it; he has set himself a certain way, and he must keep to it. Is it not so? I say so with the deepest reverence towards my Lord and Master, he has bound himself in the text with cords that he cannot break. He must now hear and help those who call upon him in the day of trouble. He has solemnly promised, and he will fully perform.

Notice that this text is *unconditional as to the persons.* It contains the gist of that other promise—"Whosoever calleth upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The people who are specially addressed in the text had mocked God; they had presented their sacrifices without a true heart; but yet the Lord said to each of them, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee." Hence I gather that he excludes none from the promise. Thou atheist, thou blasphemer, thou unchaste and impure one, if thou callest upon the Lord now, in this the day of thy trouble, he will deliver thee! Come and try him. "If there be a God," sayest thou? But there is a God, say I; come, put him to the test, and see. He saith, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee." Will you not prove him now? Come hither, ye bondaged ones, and see if he doth not free you! Come ye to Christ, all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest! In temporals and in spirituals, but specially in spiritual things, call upon him in the day of trouble, and he will deliver you. He is bound by this great unrestricted word of his, about which he has put neither ditch nor hedge; whosoever will call upon him in the day of trouble, shall be delivered.

Moreover, notice that this "I will" *includes all needful power which may be required for deliverance.* "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee." "But how can this be?" cries one. Ah! that I cannot tell you, and I do not feel bound to tell you: it rests with the Lord to find suitable ways and means. God says, "I will." Let him do it in his own way. If he says, "I will," depend upon it he will keep his word. If it be needful to shake heaven and earth, he will do it; for he cannot lack power, and he certainly does not lack honesty; and an honest man will keep his word at all costs, and so will a faithful God. Hear him say, "I will deliver thee," and ask no more questions. I do

not suppose that Daniel knew how God would deliver him out of the den of lions. I do not suppose that Joseph knew how he would be delivered out of the prison when his mistress had slandered his character so shamefully. I do not suppose that these ancient believers dreamed of the way of the Lord's deliverance; but they left themselves in God's hands. They rested upon God, and he delivered them in the best possible manner. He will do the like for you; only call upon him, and then stand still, and see the salvation of God.

Notice, *the text does not say exactly when.* "I will deliver thee" is plain enough; but whether it shall be to-morrow, or next week, or next year, is not so clear. You are in a great hurry; but the Lord is not. Your trial may not yet have wrought all the good to you that it was sent to do, and therefore it must last longer. When the gold is cast into the fining-pot, it might cry to the goldsmith, "Let me out." "No," saith he, "you have not yet lost your dross. You must tarry in the fire till I have purified you." God may therefore subject us to many trials; and yet if he says, "I will deliver thee," depend upon it he will keep his word. The Lord's promise is like a good bill from a substantial firm. A bill may be dated for three months ahead; but anybody will discount it if it bears a trusted name. When you get God's "I will," you may always cash it by faith; and no discount need be taken from it, for it is current money of the merchant even when it is only "I will." God's promise for the future is good *bonâ fide* stuff for the present, if thou hast but faith to use it, "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee," is tantamount to deliverance already received. It means, "If I do not deliver thee now, I will deliver thee at a time that is better than now, when, if thou wert as wise as I am, thou wouldst prefer to be delivered rather than now."

But promptitude is implied, for else deliverance would not be wrought. 'Ah!" says one, "I am in such a trouble that if I do not get deliverance soon I shall die." Rest assured that you shall not die. You shall be delivered, and therefore you shall be delivered before you quite die of despair. He will deliver you in the best possible time. The Lord is always punctual. You never were kept waiting by him. You have kept him waiting long enough; but he is prompt to the instant. He never keeps his servants waiting one single tick of the clock beyond his own appointed, fitting, wise, and proper moment. "I will deliver thee," implies that his delays will not be too protracted, lest the spirit of man should fail because of hope deferred. The Lord rideth on the wings of the wind when he comes to the rescue of those who seek him. Wherefore, be of good courage!

Oh, this is a blessed text! and yet what can I do with it? I cannot carry it home to those of you who want it most. Spirit of the living God, come thou, and apply these rich consolations to those hearts which are bleeding and ready to die!

Do notice this text once again. Let me repeat it, putting the emphasis in a different way: "Call upon *me* in the day of trouble, and *I* will deliver *thee.*" Pick up the threads of those two words. "*I* will deliver thee; men would not; angels could not; but I will." God himself will set about the rescue of the man that calls upon him. It is

yours to call: and it is God's to answer. Poor trembler, you begin to try to answer your own prayers! Why did you pray to God then? When you have prayed, leave it to God to fulfil his own promise. He says, "Do thou call upon me, and *I* will deliver thee."

Now take up that other word: "I will deliver *thee*." I know what you are thinking, Mr. John. You murmur, "God will deliver everybody, I believe, but *not me*." But the text saith, "I will deliver *thee*." It is the man that calls that shall get the answer. Mary, where art thou? If thou callest upon God he will answer *thee*. He will give *thee* the blessing even to thy own heart and spirit, in thy own personal experience. "Call upon me," says he, "in the day of trouble: I will deliver *thee*." Oh, for grace to take that personal pronoun home to one's soul, and to make sure of it as though you could see it with your own eyes! The apostle tells us, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God." Assuredly I know that the worlds were made by God. I am sure of it; and yet I did not see him making them. I did not see him when the light came because he said, "Let there be light." I did not see him divide the light from the darkness, and the waters that are beneath the firmament from the waters that are above the firmament, but I am quite sure that he did all this. All the evolution gentlemen in the world cannot shake my conviction that creation was wrought by God, though I was not there to see him make even a bird, or a flower. Why should I not have just the same kind of faith to-night about God's answer to my prayer if I am in trouble? If I cannot see how he will deliver me, why should I wish to see? He created the world well enough without my knowing how he was to do it, and he will deliver me without my having a finger in it. It is no business of mine to see how he works. My business is to trust in my God, and glorify him by believing that what he has promised he is able to perform.

IV. Thus we have had three sweet things to remember; and we close with a fourth, which is this: here are GOD AND THE PRAYING MAN TAKING SHARES.

That is an odd word to close with, but I want you to notice it. Here are the shares. First, here is your share: "Call upon me in the day of trouble." Secondly, here is God's share: "I will deliver thee." Again, you take a share—for you shall be delivered. And then again it is the Lord's turn—"Thou shalt glorify me." Here is a compact, a covenant that God enters into with you who pray to him, and whom he helps. He says, "You shall have the deliverance, but I must have the glory. You shall pray; I will bless; and then you shall honour my holy name." Here is a delightful partnership: we obtain that which we so greatly need, and all that God getteth is the glory which is due unto his name.

Poor troubled heart! I am sure you do not demur to these terms. "Sinners," saith the Lord, "I will give you pardon, but you must give me the honour of it." Our only answer is, "Ay, Lord, that we will, for ever and ever."

> "Who is a pardoning God like thee?
> Or who has grace so rich and free?"

"Come, souls," says he, "I will justify you, but I must have the glory

of it." And our answer is, "Where is boasting, then? It is excluded. By the law of works? Nay, but by the law of faith." God must have the glory if we are justified by Christ.

"Come," says he, "I will put you into my family, but my grace must have the glory of it;" and we say, "Ay, that it shall, good Lord! Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God."

"Now," says he, "I will sanctify you, and make you holy, but I must have the glory of it;" and our answer is, "Yes, we will sing for ever—'We have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore will we serve him day and night in his temple, giving him all praise.'"

"I will take you home to heaven," says God: "I will deliver you from sin and death and hell; but I must have the glory of it." "Truly," say we, "Thou shalt be magnified. For ever and for ever we will sing, 'Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.'"

Stop, you thief, there! What are you at? Running away with a portion of God's glory? What a villain he must be! Here is a man that was lately a drunkard, and God has loved him and made him sober, and he is wonderfully proud because he is sober. What folly! Have done, sir! Have done! Give God the glory of your deliverance from the degrading vice, or else you are still degraded by ingratitude. Here is another man. He used to swear once; but he has been praying now; he even delivered a sermon the other night, or at least an open-air address. He has been as proud about this as any peacock. O bird of pride, when you look at your fine feathers, remember your black feet, and your hideous voice! O reclaimed sinner, remember your former character, and be ashamed! Give God the glory if you have ceased to be profane. Give God the glory for every part of your salvation.

Alas! even some divines will give man a little of the glory. He has a free will, has he not? Oh, that Dagon of free will! How men will worship it! The man did something towards his salvation, by virtue of which he ought to receive some measure of honour! Do you really think so? Then say as you think. But we will have it from this pulpit, and we will declare it to the whole world, that when a man reaches heaven there shall not a particle of the glory be due to himself; he shall in no wise ascribe honour to his own feeble efforts; but unto God alone shall be the glory. "Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name."

"Call upon me in the day of trouble. I will deliver thee"—that is your part. But "Thou shalt glorify me"—that is God's part. He must have all the honour from first to last.

Go out henceforth, you saved ones, and tell out what the Lord has done for you. An aged woman once said that if the Lord Jesus Christ really did save her, he should never hear the last of it. Join with her in that resolve. Truly my soul vows that my delivering Lord shall never hear the last of my salvation.

"I'll praise him in life, and praise him in death,
And praise him as long as he lendeth me breath;
And say when the death-dew lies cold on my brow,
If ever I loved thee, my Jesus, 'tis now.'"

Come, poor soul, you that came in here to-night in the deepest of trouble, God means to glorify himself by you! The day shall yet come when you shall comfort other mourners by the rehearsal of your happy experience. The day may yet come when you that were a castaway shall preach the gospel to castaways. The day shall yet come, poor fallen woman, when you shall lead other sinners to the Saviour's feet, where now you stand weeping! Thou abandoned of the devil, whom even Satan is tired of, whom the world rejects because thou art worn out and stale—the day shall yet come when, renewed in heart, and washed in the blood of the Lamb, thou shalt shine like a star in the firmament, to the praise of the glory of his grace who hath made thee to be accepted in the Beloved! O desponding sinner, come to Jesus! Do call upon him, I entreat you! Be persuaded to call upon your God and Father. If you can do no more than groan, groan unto God. Drop a tear, heave a sigh, and let your heart say to the Lord, "O God, deliver me, for Christ's sake! Save me from my sin and the consequences of it." As surely as you thus pray, he will hear you, and say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee. Go in peace." So may it be. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Psalm l.

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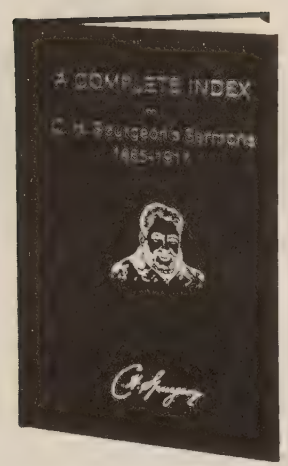

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